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ISSUE 123 · JUNE 2005

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by Andy Collins and James Wyatt
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ON THE COVER

A warforged fighter faces off against a ravenous T-Rex in this scene from artist Howard Lyon. Death and dinosaurs on the Talenta Plains.

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"She also was covered in white fur up to her throat and held a long straight golden wand in her right hand and wore a golden crown on her head. Her face was white—not merely pale, but white like snow or paper or icing sugar, except for her very red mouth. It was a beautiful face in other respects, but proud and cold and stern."

C.S. Lewis
The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

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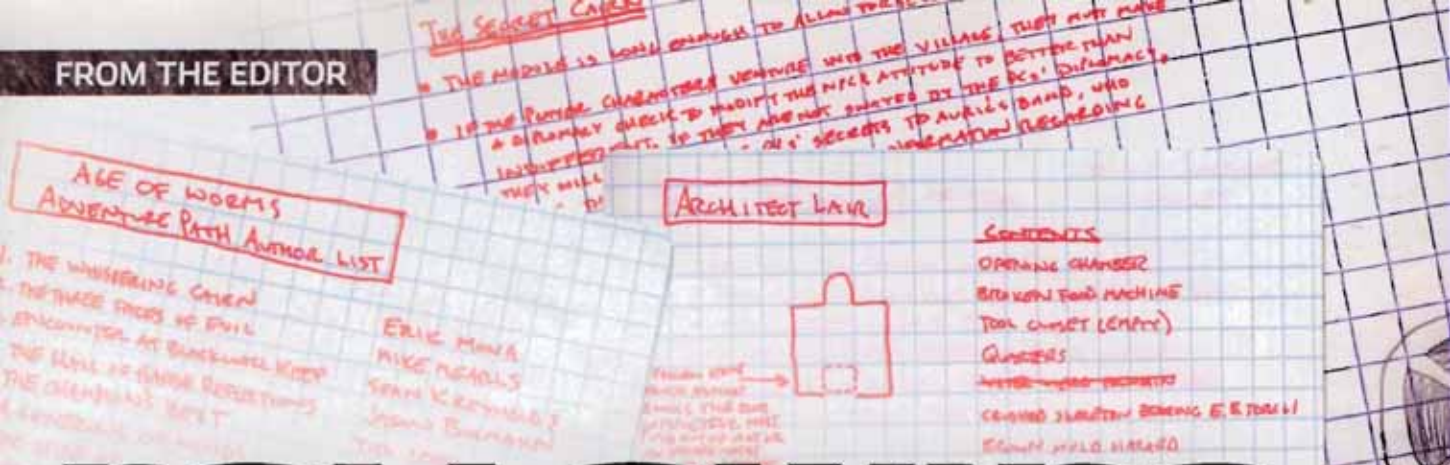

FOLLOWING THE PATH

"So I have this crazy idea," Chris Thomasson told me one summer day. "I'm going to publish a whole campaign, from start to finish. I'm thinking we'll set it in a city built into a volcano. We can get our favorite professional game designers and our favorite regular contributors to put together the adventures, and the whole thing will be written from a single outline from the beginning." He balanced from foot to foot, nodding rapidly, his eyebrows stretched to the sky.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Are you kidding?" I replied. "I think it sounds @#&#ing brilliant. I want a spot at the lunchtime playtest."

A year later, after Chris left his position as editor-in-chief of this magazine for the dream job of editing *Dragon*, the Shackled City Adventure Path fell under my purview, and into the able hands of Mr. James Jacobs, our diligent managing editor. We continued Chris's work, meeting with authors to mull over important story points, crafting carefully worded art orders to send to cartographers and illustrators, and marveling at the absolutely devious stuff our authors kept throwing at us. We missed it the minute it ended.

Even before the Shackled City went out with a literal bang, I started tinkering with the concepts and ideas that would form the basis of *Dungeon*'s next full-feature campaign, the Age of Worms Adventure Path.

Starting next issue, we'll take you and your players on an epic quest spanning twelve issues of *Dungeon*, with supplementary material in *Dragon* and online at paizo.com. Age of Worms will take your player characters from the desperate days of 1st level all the way to the awesome responsibilities of 20th. Along the way they'll battle diabolical cults, halt a lizardfolk invasion in its murky tracks, infiltrate the den of a doppleganger spymaster, and slay an undead consort to Tiamat.

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The campaign's early action takes place more than a thousand miles from the city of Cauldron, but fans of the Shackled City will see a few familiar faces in the Age of Worms Adventure Path. The Ebon Triad, a shadowy cult who assisted the Cagewrights, plays a major role in the Age of Worms, attempting to hasten its onset as a precursor to their despicable goal. The mysterious Celeste appears once more, and this time we'll even let you in on the secret. Speaking of secrets, here are a few clues to get the mind wandering for you D&D scholars out there: Pesh, Dragotha, Khellek, Redhand, and most importantly, Kyuss.

So far, Age of Worms authors include Wolfgang Baur, Sean K Reynolds, Mike Mearls, Jesse Decker, Tito Leati, and Greg A. Vaughan. Keith Baker and Eric L. Boyd will provide Eberron and Forgotten Realms conversion notes. James and I will each contribute a single installment. After spending so much time plotting out the series and obsessing over its tiniest detail, we simply couldn't resist.

My installment, "The Whispering Cairn," comes next month, as part of a special oversized issue complete with a huge map of Diamond Lake, the corrupt mining town that anchors the first act of the Adventure Path. As I write this I've been running the playtest for five weeks, and I hope you and your players enjoy it as much as we have.

ERIK

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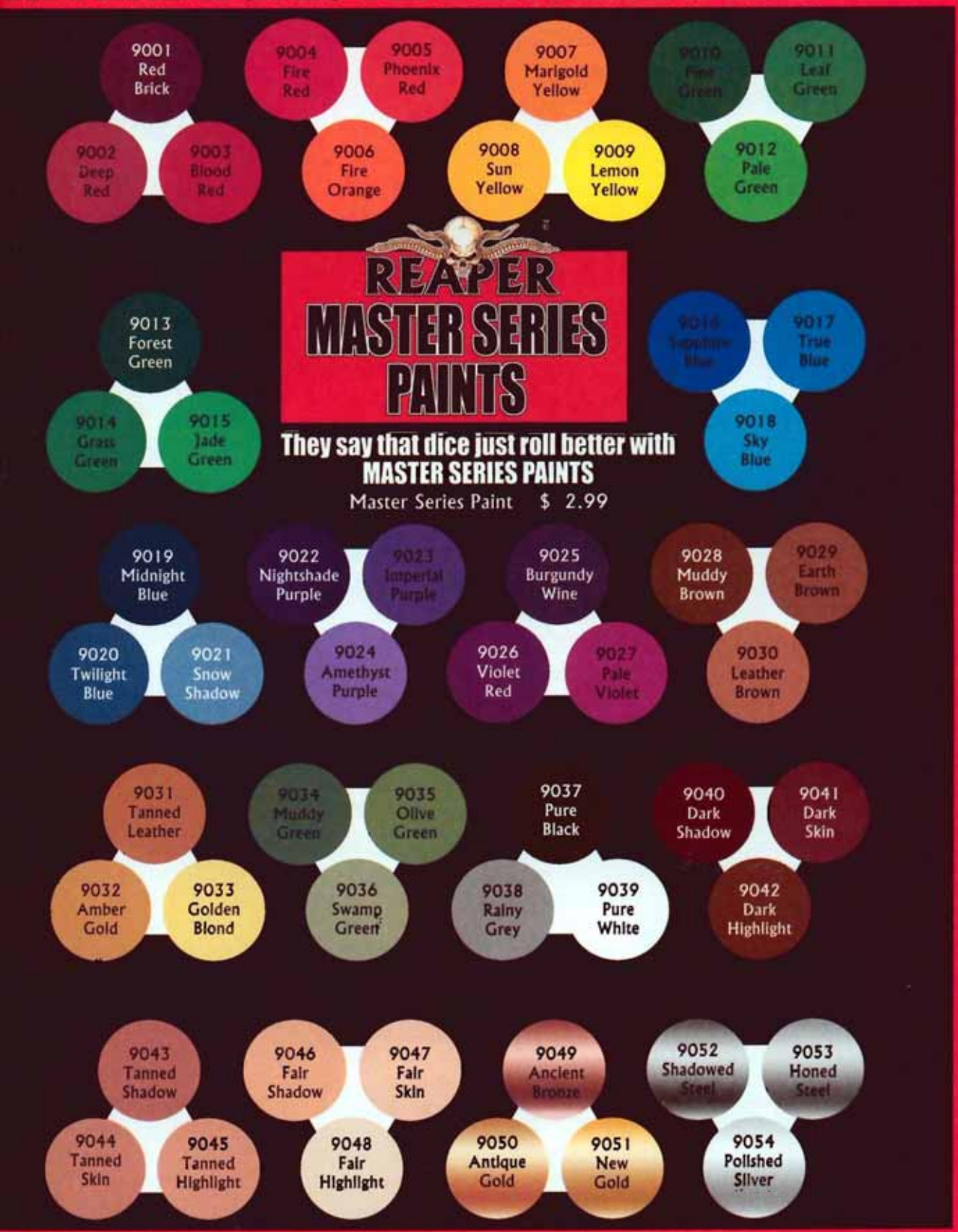

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Check out the *Dungeon* messageboards at paizo.com/dungeon.

Dungeon #120

Readers adored Sean K Reynolds's *Dungeon* debut, with "The Lost Temple of Demogorgon," a deadly dungeon crawl packed with evil baboons, troglodytes, and fiendish apes. "Forsaken Arch," by Timothy J. Haener, allowed us the chance to give more exposure to the kenku, a favorite monster of the *Dungeon* staff.

"The Obsidian Eye," by Nicolas Logue and Brendan Victorson, took *Dungeon* readers on a trip to a distant desert, giving everyone a chance to see new rules from *Sandstorm* in play. Judging by the response, you liked what you saw.

Incredibly, my editorial drew the most mail and message board commentary. In it I discussed *Castle Bristol*, a D&D epic from a 7-year-old Erik Mona. The dungeon included evil beasts known as explosion dogs that, you guessed it, explode. There's something about animal chunks that really gets *Dungeon* readers motivated to write in. Come and get it!

Lastly, issue #120 included part three of *Dungeon*'s popular four-part World of Greyhawk poster map. We're currently working with Wizards of the Coast to decide what official areas will next receive the royal treatment, and your feedback on the matter is of course most appreciated. Back issues of *Dungeon* #120 and dozens of other great issues are available now at paizo.com.

Prison Mail

Illustration by Mike Schley

Shackled City Hardcover

I have finally found the time to write to you to express my opinions on the "new look" of *Dungeon*. In one word: FANTASTIC! I feel it is more streamlined, with the adventures catering for all levels, areas, themes and great artwork!

I particularly enjoy the new articles by Monte Cook and Wil Wheaton. Wil's take on the gaming world has me laughing, and I think it's refreshing to read that a star like this enjoys "getting his geek on" as much as us mere mortals.

As far as the adventures are concerned, I think it would be cool to see the Cauldron Adventure Path published as either a softback or available for download. I missed out on issue #104! Also more AD&D adventures converted to 3.5 edition!

Keep up the great work, a well-deserved thumbs up from me!

Matthew
Via Email

Well, Matthew, I have some very bad news for you and for all Dungeon *readers. Paizo Publishing has no current plans to release the Shackled City Adventure Path in a softback or to make it available for download. It's just not going to happen.*

Instead, we've decided to release it as a 416-page hardcover. For $59.95, you'll get 11 unforgettable adventures from David Noonan, Christopher Perkins, Chris Thomasson, Jesse Decker, James Jacobs, and Tito Leati plus dozens of new illustrations, a pull-out map booklet, and a huge poster map of the city of Cauldron. We'll also include a completely new Shackled City adventure from Christopher Perkins. Look for Dungeon Classics: The Shackled City Adventure Path *this July at fine game stores and online at paizo.com.*

Map This!

In a recent issue, you asked for suggestions for possible poster maps in the future. Here's my vote—or, rather, votes.

1. Central and western regions of Oerik. It would be great to see more of the Greyhawk world given form and detail.
2. DETAILED city maps. The map of Cauldron in issue #97 was great! Poster maps of the city of Greyhawk or of major cities in the Forgotten Realms would be terrific. I know some of these cities had maps made of them for old TSR products, but a lot of new gamers (or returning gamers, like me) don't have access to those old maps.

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This Month in Dragon

Dragon #332

DRAGON gives you the best in gaming, presenting new official rules, original game content, great advice, and the perfect inspiration for your D&D game. In each issue, you'll also see what cool products are on the horizon, find out what other players are up to, and get an insider's look at the industry. Get more from your game: Get DRAGON!

Chromatic Player Characters
by Mike McArtor
You asked for it! Last year, DRAGON brought you the rules for playing metallic dragon PCs. This year, we delve deep into the black heart of evil dragons, presenting all five chromatic dragons broken down into levels you can use for your player characters.

Cult of the Dragon Below
by Keith Baker
EBERRON's creator gives us insight into the diabolical plans of those who worship the horrors of Khyber, the Dragon Below.

Cutting up the Dragon
by Matt Forbeck
The dragon is dead, but what do you do with the carcass? Learn about the juiciest bits and what you can make out of them.

Plus!
A super-sized Ecology of the Kobold, Dragon Spells, Class Acts, Bazaar of the Bizarre, First Watch, Scale Mail, Spellcraft, Sage Advice, and comics.

3. Detailed ocean floor maps of places like the Azure Sea, the Solnor Ocean, or the Dramidj Ocean. Similar maps for important, large bodies of water in the FORGOTTEN REALMS would be nice too.
4. Ancient maps. For example, what did the physical and political landscape of the Flanaess look like 1,000 or 3,000 years ago?
5. Historical maps. Maps that show the migration of peoples, the campaigns of armies, trade routes, the occurrence of important events and so on.

On the subject of useful maps in general, another product that I'd find interesting and very handy would be good 11×17 outline maps of the different regions of both the Flanaess and Faerûn. Black and white maps with no names for anything and no political symbols represented—just physical symbols for mountains, hills, rivers, and bodies of water, drawn to a scale easily re-scaled by hand (using standard ruler divisions to create larger and smaller scales). Although I imagine this is probably an idea better suited to DRAGON, it might make a good supplement for the Campaign Workbook. This would allow DMs like me, who enjoy gaming on the fringes of simulation, to photocopy the map template and make all kinds of special purpose maps on the largest standard copy paper size available.

Lyon Virostko
Billings, MT

No Disrespect Intended

I would like to know why you allowed the Critical Threat in DUNGEON #114 to be published with its current name of Lassiviren?

As a resident of Finland, I find it quite offensive that one of our most respected Olympians is degraded by giving his name to a fictional assassin character, only because the man/woman who originally created that character obviously thought that taking an existing foreign name would be a good idea instead of showing a shred of originality by creating a proper fantasy name.

More information about Lasse Viren:
http://www.olympic.org/uk/athletes/heroes/bio_uk.asp?PAR_I_ID=43478

I hope you avoid such errors in the future.

Sampo Haarlaa
Via Email

Oh what a difference a vowel makes! Lassiviren the Dark first appeared in the first edition Rogue's Gallery, *published in 1980. While I suppose it's possible that the authors of that work took inspiration from Finland's track hero of the 1972 Montreal Olympics, I think it's far more likely that the whole thing is a coincidence. Most American gamers I know can't even name eight Major League Baseball players. You'll have to take my word for it when I say we're a little rusty on our Finnish Olympians.*

Where's the Grid?

In DUNGEON #120's "The Obsidian Eye," what is the scale of the maps of Kashral Oasis and the Black Obsidian and environs (including the dungeons)?

Jose M. Aguirre
Via Emial

I blame the Curse of the Mummy for the lack of scale information on those maps, Jose. Looking into the All-Seeing Scarab, however, I can say with some authority that the scale for the interior map on page 30 is 40 feet to the inch. The scale for the oasis map is also roughly 40 feet to the inch.

Two Answers

Two questions:

1. Do you have any recommendations on what maps would-be authors should use and how to use them in their submissions? For example, is it okay to use a map from the Map-A-Week series on wizards.com? Do all maps need to be made (in some form or another) by the author of the adventure?
2. Have you considered publishing adventures that make use of digital media to enhance the adventure?

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WHITE WOLF

ARTHAUS

While some DMs may be unable to use such things, it seems that a laptop is more and more becoming a common DM's tool. It would be relatively simple to write some software (for Mac, PC, and Linux) that allows the DM to use sound or visual-based puzzles. Puzzles that require matching tones and that sort of thing seem like they could be a very enriching component of adventures if properly used.

Zach Toups
Via Email

Check out our detailed submission guidelines at paizo.com/dungeon for a more detailed discussion of how to prepare an adventure for potential publication in this magazine. In short, all maps should be original (meaning not taken off a website or out of an existing book). They don't have to be pretty, but they do have to be legible enough that our professional cartographers can make them clear and attractive without having to do a lot of guesswork. To answer your second question, we do not currently publish adventures that require the use of a computer. An adventure might come with the coolest computer utility in the world, but that's probably not going to help the soldier in Iraq looking for a few hours of D&D distraction with his fellow troops. Until we can assume that all of our readers have access to computers, it's probably not going to happen. We're certainly closer to that reality than we were 10 or even 5 years ago, but it's still a way off.

I should note, however, that we've been regularly publishing online map and illustration supplements for Dungeon *since the introduction of the new format in issue #114.*

Explosion Dogs

I felt that I had to write after Erik's editorial about *Castle Bristol* and the explosion dogs. I am stationed in Iraq, but maintain my subscription to both *Dungeon* and *Dragon*, so I recently received *Dungeon* #120 with your editorial about the explosion dogs. Shortly after reading the article, my roommate and I were listening to an intel brief on things to watch for while on patrol. The LT giving the brief was talking about new methods that have been used for IEDs. The latest was making a fake dog and filling it with explosives... my roommate and I just looked at each other and recited one line: "Explosion Dogs." It took us most of the day to stop laughing about it, and we still have a good chuckle with that one.

I felt that had to be shared, being as you were the originator of our mirth for the day.

Thank you for all the wonderful articles, and funny stories... they keep us going and adventuring over here.

Sgt. Robert Sumner
Via Email

Thanks so much for your letter, Robert. It really makes us proud to know that our magazines help you guys pass the time and stay sane over there, during what seems to be turning into an increasingly crazy situation (I mean, explosion dogs? Come on!*). To all of our active duty military readers: Please stay safe, and we hope to see you home soon.*

I Am Your Father

Your recent editorial hinting at the coming of the next Adventure Path series brought up an idea in my mind I wanted to share with you. As I was looking at your notes for all the campaign ideas, I felt a sense of nostalgia about homegrown campaigns. As I thought about them, I asked myself, "What makes homegrown campaigns much better than purchased campaigns?" While I'm sure there are quite a few reasons, not the least of which is the care and effort put into it by the DM, I think I discovered one area that published adventures lack, and that is a focus on the family. In all of my campaigns, I have my players give me rounded-out histories of their characters, including their family trees. I usually offer a free feat or minor magic item to players to give them incentive to really do this well. Anyway, this background information that the players create is ALWAYS pivotal to the future story. As a character's brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, friends, associates, wives, husbands, and children become involved in the story, it adds tension.

As a student and teacher of fiction writing, these "family" techniques are often used to create rooting interest in characters. A very simple way to express this is to use the *Star Wars* movies as an example. When we found out Luke was Darth Vader's son, everything changed. When we learned he was sister to Leia... again, the story became tighter and better.

This is also the core of what makes a good novel. A good character, with family relationships.

And that is one of the things *Dungeon* adventures lack. Homegrown campaigns do it, but published adventures don't. Oh we have villains, and the stories are awesome (particularly the Adventure Path series), but they lack the tie in to characters and families.

In the coming year Troll Lord Games will be publishing my *Cult of Yex* campaign adventure that goes from 1st to 20th level. In that adventure we wanted to use the family connections to create a better story, but faced the same problem I'm sure you do. How do you do that without railroading the story? Well... we choose a middle path. One of the characters in the story has to be a human, male, wizard. Period. If you don't play it that way, the whole story doesn't work. We can't have a Luke discovering his father is Darth Vader moment without it.

The truth in storytelling is that we can actually do anything we want, we just have to pay a price. The price we've paid, after many playtests, is that we've learned that some players hate to have their character defined for them, even if it's just who your parents are (we don't force any personality traits, just parentage, class, and race). They just hate it. (One player insisted on making the lead character a female halfling, no matter how hard we explained that it just wouldn't work.) And so we have taken steps to make each step of the story

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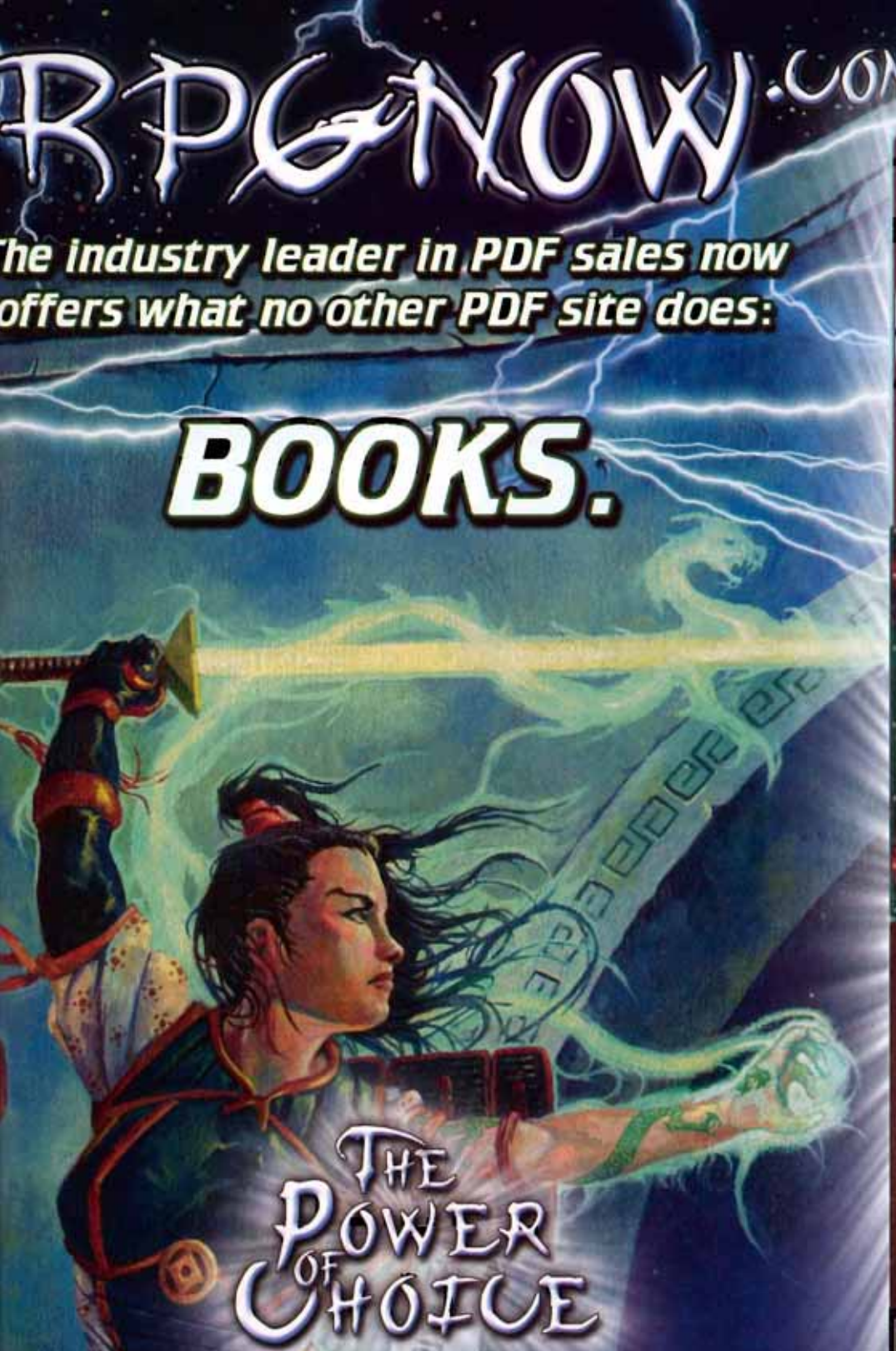

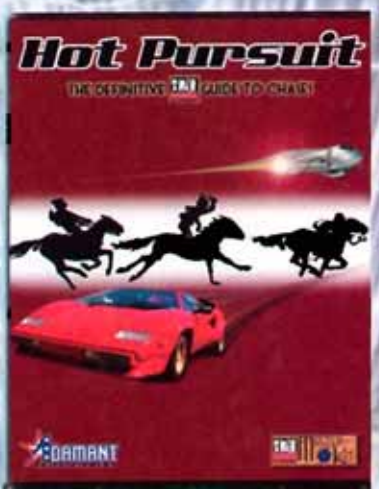

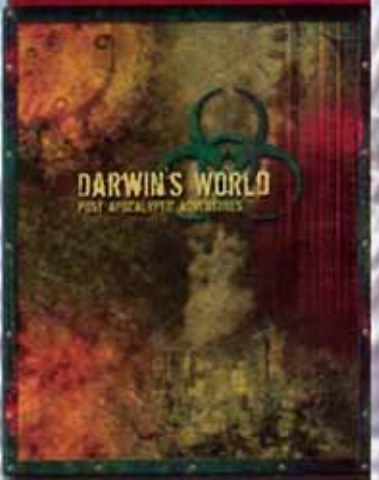

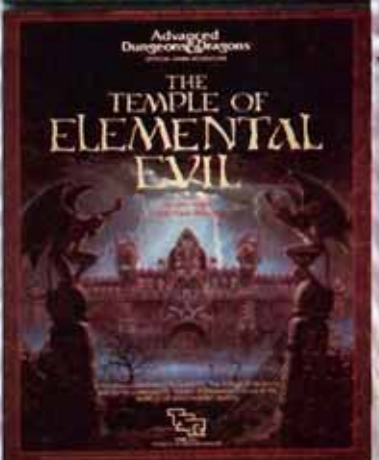

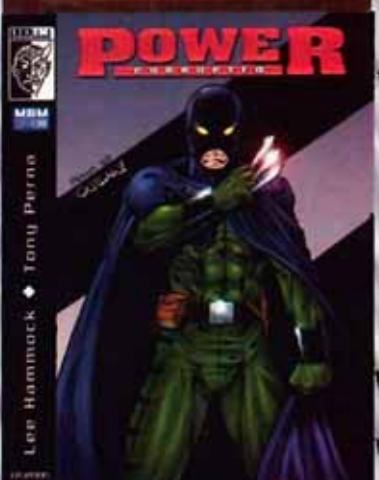

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Next Month in Dungeon

Dungeon #124

The Whispering Cairn

by Erik Mona

In the corrupt mining town of Diamond Lake, a handful of would-be adventurers gather to explore an ancient tomb, eager to trade their discoveries for a ticket to a better life. What they find within the Whispering Cairn dates back to the legendary Wind Dukes of Aqaa, and presages the advent of the Age of Worms, an era of darkness, decay, and writhing doom. An Age of Worms Adventure Path adventure for 1st-level characters.

Backdrop: Diamond Lake

by Erik Mona

This is it! Kick off DUNGEON's new 12-adventure Age of Worms Adventure Path campaign with this overview of Diamond Lake, a run-down mining community nestled in hills laden with the tombs of a dozen lost civilizations. Consult the wily sage Allustan, cross paths with the treacherous Balabar Smenk, and always, always keep your coinpurse firmly in hand. Includes a huge poster map by Robert Lazzaretti!

Maure Castle: Chambers of Antiquities

By Robert J. Kuntz

Deep under the ruins of Maure Castle lie the Chambers of Antiquities, a series of vaults designed by ancient wizards to store magic items even they didn't quite understand. Do you dare explore a dungeon where the treasure can be (and often is) even more dangerous than the creatures and traps that guard it? A continuation of last year's hit "Maure Castle," "Chambers of Antiquities" is a D&D adventure for 16th-level characters.

Temple of the Scorpion God

By Andy Collins and James Wyatt

The PCs follow slim leads to the unexplored continent of Xen'drik, where a dragonshard of unprecidented size lies within a treacherous ancient ruin dedicated to a long-dead scorpion god. "Temple of the Scorpion God" is part two of the three-part "Shards of Eberron" Campaign Arc. An EBERRON adventure for 6th-level characters.

generic so that you can play it with any characters. You lose the effect of the *entire* campaign, the emotional impact of finding out Darth Vader is your father, so to speak. The result is that our players have come away happy. Groups that want the epic style accept the limitation of one character being a human male wizard. Eventually, we make sure that the choice pays off. But those who don't want to do it that way have modified things slightly, and the story still manages to be exciting (though not as much, if you ask us!).

Anyway, as I ruminated on these concepts, I thought I would pass them along to you. I would encourage you, especially with the Adventure Path coming up, to include moments like Luke finding out his father is Darth Vader. When these moments occur in my homegrown campaigns, I see the players shiver with excitement as the implications hit them! And as I looked at your notes in your editorial, I'm sure you have been able to create the same effect with your players. Let's shoot for doing it in the magazine as well, how about it?

Jason F. Smith
Via Email

The Age of Worms Adventure Path will have plenty of surprising revelations, double-crosses, and character-building moments, but I'm afraid none of them will be of the "someone's got to be a human wizard, period" variety. DUNGEON caters to more than 40,000 gamers, all with their own approach to playing the game and assuming the roles of their player characters. Many of them don't like to play wizards, and many prefer gnomes, elves, dwarves, or halflings to humans. We try to make DUNGEON adventures accessible and fun for the widest variety of D&D players and characters imaginable, which means leaving some details like family firmly in the domain of the DM working hand-in-hand with his players. For more on how the DM might go about doing this, check out Monte Cook's Dungeoncraft article later in this very issue.

"If you don't play it that way, the whole story doesn't work" isn't a phrase our readers should expect to see in the magazine any time soon.—Erik Mona

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SALVAGE OPERATION

BY MIKE MEARLS,
BY ATTILA ADORJANY,
BY KYLE HUNTER,
ANY SETTING, LOW-LEVEL (1ST–5TH), DUNGEON CRAWL

When a ship missing for many years is spotted adrift at sea, its one-time owner sees it as his final chance to recover his lost fortune. What he cannot know is that the ship has a new tenant—a most wretched druid, forged in a crucible of cannibalism and surrounded by thousands of venomous pets.

"Salvage Operation" is a D&D adventure suitable for four 2nd-level characters. This adventure is designed to work with any campaign setting.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The merchant prince Aubreck Drallion once stood among the city's richest men. His ships sailed the sea, daring pirate raids, aquatic monsters, and storm-tossed oceans to carry goods across the world. Aubreck's trade fleet was among the largest and most prosperous of its kind.

Yet perhaps Aubreck's success came too fast and too easily. While his profits eventually plateaued, his ambition kept expanding. When his contacts in the southern jungles reported that he could monopolize trade in several spices and rare herbs by offering a cache of magical items to a powerful native shaman, he leapt at the chance. He sold off many of his assets overnight to purchase the required items and loaded them aboard *Emperor of the Waves*, the foremost ship in his fleet. His entire fortunes sailed with the great ship.

But fate was cruel, and *Emperor of the Waves* disappeared. A storm separated the ship from her escort, leaving her final location unknown. Devastated by the financial loss, Aubreck became a simple merchant. He never again regained his glory, and many potential business partners saw his disastrous failure as a sign of hubris and even divine retribution.

The ship's actual fate is known to only a few. *Emperor of the Waves* was almost destroyed in the storm that drove it off course so long ago. Its surviving crew dropped anchor at an uncharted island for repairs. Alas, the island was home to a strange tribe of orcs who worshiped an obscure demon lord named Tharzax, patron of poisonous things that creep and crawl. The *Emperor's* crew was captured by the orc tribe, who then took the ship as an offering from their god and turned it into a temple.

In time, the tribe fell to in-fighting and cannibalism. Several half-orcs were born as the orcs enslaved some of the ship's crew. The half-orcs led an uprising but were brutally put down by the island's ruler, a mighty lich. The survivors used

their crude knowledge of sailing to pull up their temple's anchor and escape. They soon ran out of food and reverted back to cannibalism. Eventually, only one of their number, a druid named Krell Grohlg, remained alive.

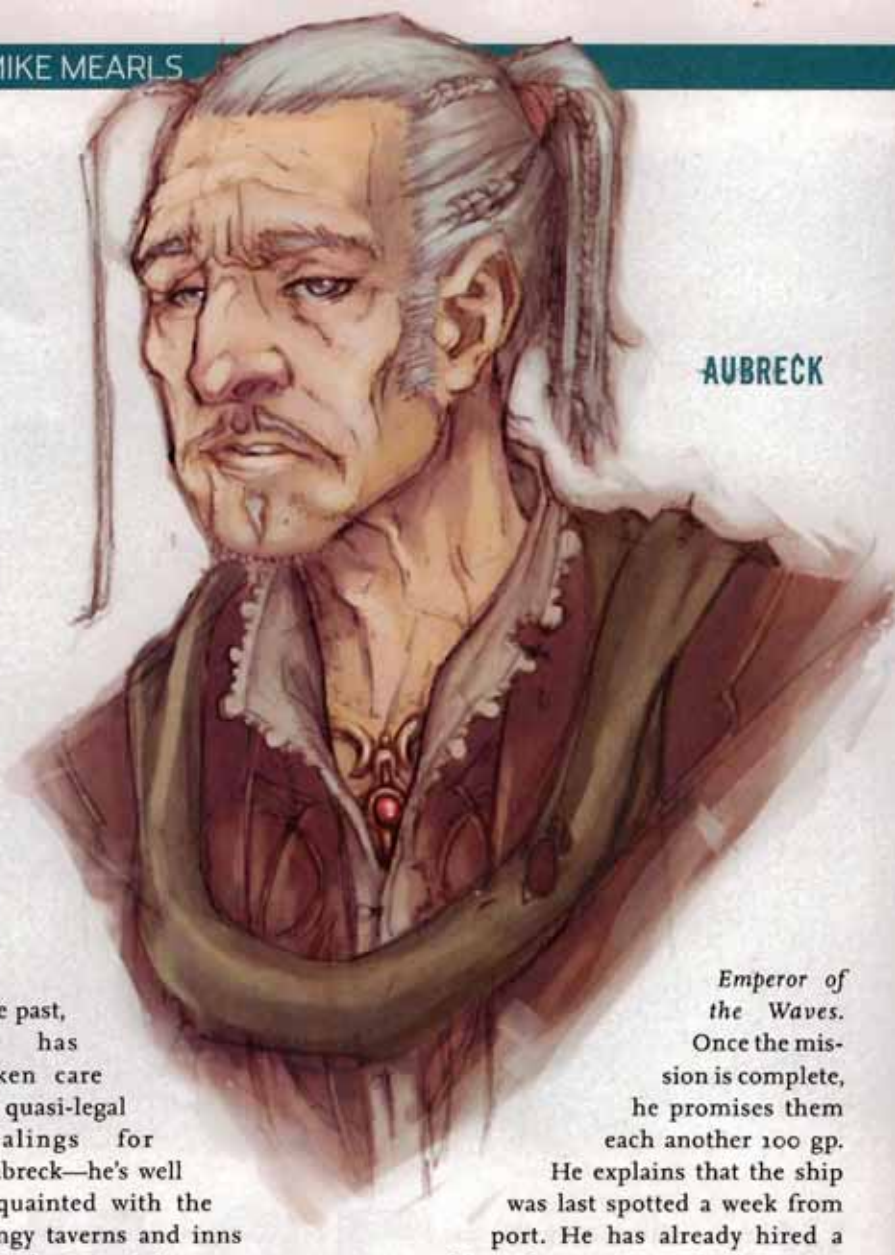
Four days ago, the derelict *Emperor of the Waves* was spotted off the coast. Aubreck is poor, but he can still afford to hire a ship, a few men-at-arms, and a party of inexperienced adventurers to venture out to sea and discover the secret of the vessel's fate. Aubreck believes that he can restore his former glory if he can recover the magic items that sailed with the *Emperor*. All he needs are a few brave souls eager for adventure.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

"Salvage Operation" starts out as an investigatory adventure, as the party must board the *Emperor* and explore her upper decks. As they venture into the ship's lower decks, it becomes a dungeon crawl in a cramped, dangerous location as swarms of insects attack them in close quarters. The climax of the adventure is a race against time, for as the characters penetrate the lowest holds, they find the area flooded with seawater and infested with undead. As the PCs battle their way toward their goal, the sea finally takes its delayed claim on the *Emperor* in the form of a hungry giant squid. The ship begins sinking, flooding the decks with water and forcing the PCs to race for their lives. If the characters want to receive their payment, they must retrieve a large box from the cargo hold, forcing them to choose between safety and greed.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Pulling the characters into this adventure is relatively simple. Aubreck is desperate for help, yet not quite ready to tip his hand. He fears that if he spreads the news of the expedition too widely, other treasure seekers might beat him to the derelict *Emperor*. Aubreck dispatches his butler Vertheg (N male half-orc expert 2) to find a suitable band of adventurers. Vertheg is tall, lanky, and awkward. A single tusk juts out from his lower jaw, and his green, warty skin contrasts with his fine, neat clothes. In the past, he has taken care of quasi-legal dealings for Aubreck—he's well acquainted with the dingy taverns and inns that the PCs might stay at.



AUBRECK

Alternatively, the PCs might need an object lost with the *Emperor of the Waves* years ago. In this case, Aubreck dispatches Vertheg to find them in order to propose an alliance.

CHAPTER ONE: DESPERATE FORTUNES

Aubreck (LN male human expert 6) has seen better days. His mansion is large but rundown. His threadbare clothes were the height of fashion a decade ago, but now they are battered and worn. He keeps his iron-gray hair pulled back in a short tail, and his mustache is neatly tended.

Aubreck offers each character 100 gp in advance to accompany his expedition to recover goods from the derelict *Emperor of the Waves*. Once the mission is complete, he promises them each another 100 gp. He explains that the ship was last spotted a week from port. He has already hired a ship and crew. He needs the PCs to board the *Emperor* once they reach the ship, search it, secure one particular box of "personal items," and bring it back to Aubreck.

The box is made from a blue, sparkling metal and is kept within a crate branded with the letter "A." It can only be opened with a password known only to Aubreck. It contains a *cloak of resistance* +5 and several *figurines of wondrous power*, but Aubreck is hesitant to tell the PCs this since he fears tempting them with its contents. Aubreck plans to sell these items off in order to fund several ambitious new business ventures.

THE SOUL OF WINTER

Manned by a crew of sturdy dwarves, *The Soul of Winter* is a small but well-run

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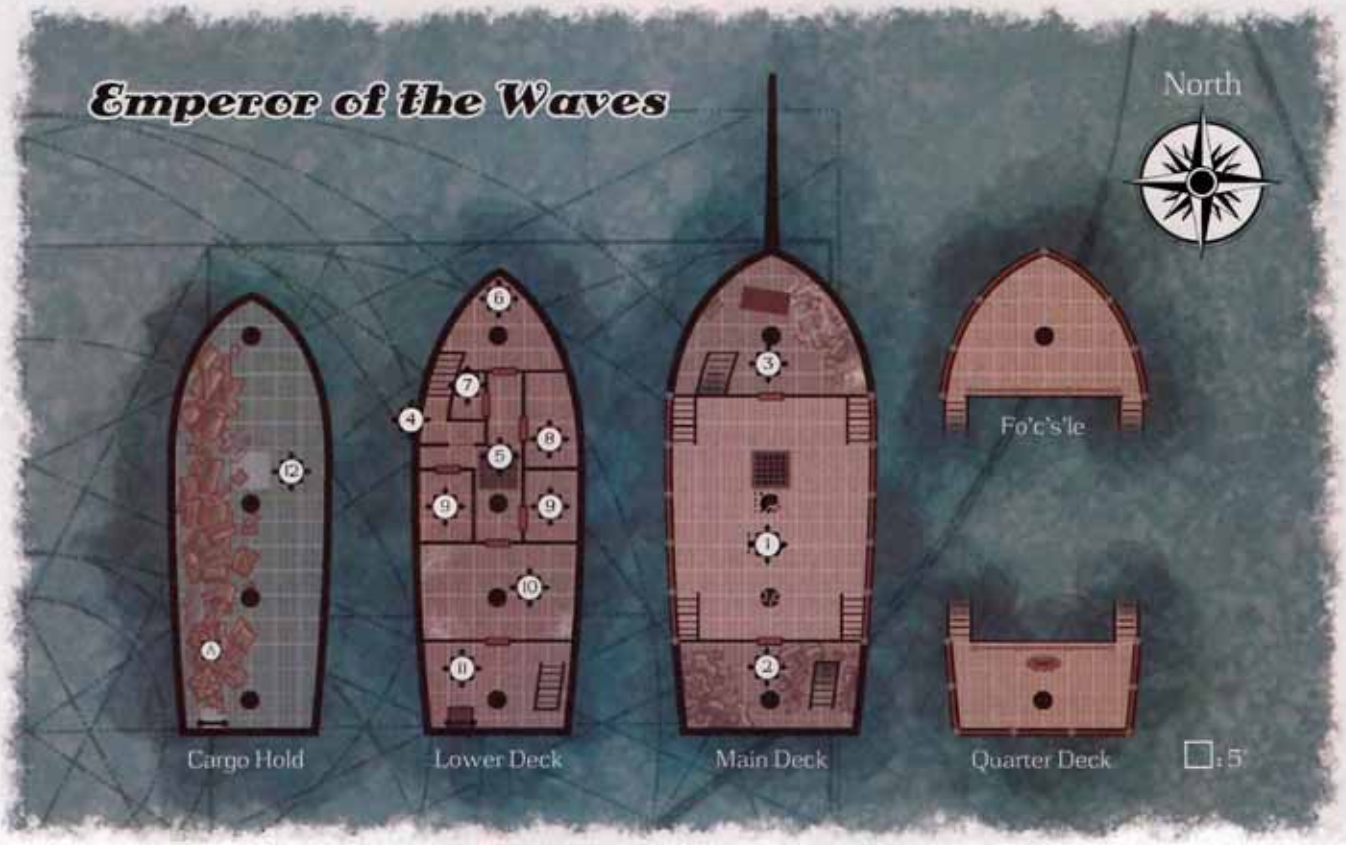

vessel. Its captain, Wolgar Windrune (N male dwarf expert 5), runs a tight ship. He insists that PCs and Aubreck remain confined to their quarters, a cramped chamber below decks, during the voyage. The crew remains aboard *The Soul of Winter* during this adventure, and refuses to board *Emperor of the Waves*. Each of the 10 crewmen is a male dwarf warrior 1/expert 1.

Aubreck also purchased supplies for the party to help them as they explore the derelict. In a small impromptu armory aboard *The Soul of Winter* he has set aside some gear for the PCs, including suits of studded leather armor for each of them, two light crossbows, 40 bolts, five 50-foot coils of rope, two grappling hooks, 12 torches, six vials of alchemist's fire, six vials of antitoxin, two *potions of cure light wounds*, 12 tindertwigs, and six sacks for carrying treasure out of the ship.

The journey to the derelict is uneventful. If the PCs need a quick dose of XP to make it to 2nd level, you can throw an encounter with pirates, sahuagin, or some other menace at them.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DERELICT EMPEROR

After two days at sea, *The Soul of Winter* finally comes within sight of the derelict *Emperor*. In the distance, the great ship's shattered hulk looms. Its masts have been shorn off, but the upper deck appears empty of debris, almost as if some force carried off the masts, sails, and rigging. Its figurehead, once a majestic angel in flight, has been hacked to pieces. Aubreck reacts to the sight of his ruined ship with a mix of despair and hope.

Wolgar brings *The Soul of Winter* within 200 feet of the derelict and orders two sailors to ferry the PCs across the water in a rowboat. The sailors pack ropes and grappling hooks in the boat to give the PCs easy access to the main deck, which still requires a successful DC 5 Climb check to board.

The *Emperor* is in poor repair, yet for now the ship remains structurally sound. The wood of its decks and walls is rotted and, in some places, collapsed. The vessel groans in the wind, while water collects in puddles where waves have crashed over the deck. The ship lists noticeably, with its upper deck sloping gently downward to port, but the list isn't severe enough yet to require Balance checks from those on board. It's a minor miracle that the derelict has not yet sunk to the bottom.

Anyone viewing the wreck can make a DC 15 Profession (sailor) check to determine that the *Emperor* has taken on some water. There is a good chance that it will sink within the next day or two unless it receives extensive repairs in dry-dock. If the PCs lack this skill or fail their checks, one of the sailors points this out to them.

The Soul remains 500 feet from the derelict, while the dwarves keep a manned rowboat about 200 feet to port if the PCs need a quick pickup.

1. ABOVE DECK

The Emperor's upper deck slopes gently down to port. Short, wooden stumps are all that remain of its masts. The double doors leading to cabins fore and aft appear intact, while a metal grate in the deck offers access to the lower decks. Aside from the rhythmic

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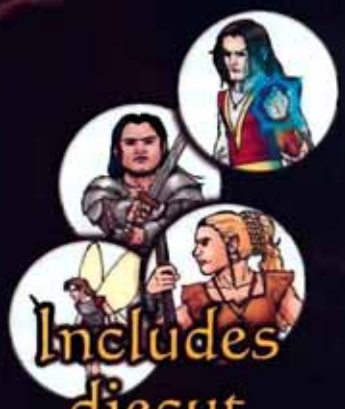

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creak of the ship's badly weathered, soaking timbers, all seems quiet.

This deck is currently unoccupied. The doors to the fore and aft open with little protest, and the wheel turns easily and freely. A DC 10 Profession (sailor) check reveals that the ship's rudder no longer responds to the wheel.

A DC 15 Search check on the deck turns up old bloodstains across the area. The grate set into the deck provides access to the lower levels. It is rusted shut and has a ladder mounted beneath it. The grate leads to area 5. Anyone looking through the grate may make a DC 10 Spot check to notice a number of fist-sized spiders crawling on the floor and walls of the passage below.

Rusted Grate: 3 in. thick; Hardness 8; hp 7; Break DC 15.

2. ALTAR TO THARZAX (EL 2)

A rough stone altar dominates this cabin. Strange markings cover its surface. Dried mud cakes the floor around it, while human skulls ring the wall above it, each mounted on a wooden spike. The northeast and southwest corners of this room are filled with garbage and debris—crudely hacked wooden logs, smashed furniture, torn sacks, shattered crates, and small piles of dried, brown palm fronds. A staircase choked with debris occupies the southeast corner, and a thick, acrid odor fills the air.

This chamber was once the captain's cabin. Now, it's a shrine to Tharzax, demon lord of poison. A DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check reveals this information. The skulls are cracked, worn, and obviously old. Clearing the stairs to area 11 takes an hour of work for four people working together.

Creatures: Lurking under the garbage and debris is a massive vermin once held sacred by the cultists of Tharzax—a monstrous centipede. If anyone other than the druid Krell enters the room, it bursts from the rubble in the port side of the room and attacks, surprising anyone who doesn't notice it hiding beforehand (it has Hide +2).

Huge Monstrous Centipede: hp 33; *Monster Manual* 286.

Treasure: A minor offering to Tharzax is hidden in the dried mud on the floor. A DC 10 Search check uncovers a small sack filled with 10 red rubies worth 100 gp each.

If the PCs examine the debris to the southwest with a DC 15 Search check they find the ship's ledgers and captain's log. The log is written in Common and details the ship's last voyage, including an account of the terrible storm that threw the *Emperor* off course and separated it from its escort. Running low on food and drinkable water, the ship was forced to drop anchor off an uncharted island. The last entry describes an attack by orcs that fought alongside a variety of insects. Though the crew beat off this initial attack, they suffered heavy casualties. The final entry records the captain's fear that this attack may have only been the precursor to an even larger attack.

3. NAVIGATOR'S ROOM (EL 2)

The door to this room from the deck is partially barricaded shut by a thick mass of webbing behind it. A DC 15 Strength check smashes the door open.

Thick sheets of spider webs choke this room. A small, cramped, open space to port provides access to a narrow staircase heading down. Near the bow, within the webs, sits a single table surrounded by four chairs.

Creature: A monstrous spider lurks near the ceiling of this room. Allow it a +0 Listen check to notice approaching PCs. It automatically hears the PCs' first attempt to force open the door.

The spider drops upon the first character to enter the room, likely attacking with surprise if no one notices it with a successful Spot check.

Large Monstrous Spider: hp 22; *Monster Manual* 289.

Treasure: The furniture in this room is worthless, but the table is still covered with charts and maps. While these documents are old and crumbling, they show the location of the island where the *Emperor* met its fate.

Development: Combat in this room arouses the hungry insects in the decks below. 1d6 rounds after the sounds of combat begin, a swarm of spiders from area 5 boils up the stairs into this room to attack anything still within.

4. WEBBED PASSAGE (EL 3)

Two monstrous spiders have spun a web across this small chamber at the point marked with the dotted line. A DC 20 Spot check notices the web. Otherwise, characters could stumble into it and become entangled as detailed on page 289 of the *Monster Manual*.

Creatures: The two spiders hide just down the passage to the east. Their tremorsense allows them to note if a creature becomes trapped in the webs. At that point, they rush forward to attack. Driven by hunger, they fight to the death. They try to web their opponents from a distance before closing to melee.

Medium Monstrous Spiders (2): hp 11; *Monster Manual* 288.

Treasure: In the northeast corner of this area lies a crude silver bracelet worth 250 gp.

Development: Once battle is joined, the spiders from area 5 rush forward to join in the feast in 1d6 rounds.

5. SPIDER NEST (EL 3)

This area is choked with spider webs, but a DC 20 Search check reveals a trap door leading down to the cargo hold. The characters must use fire or slashing weapons to inflict 20 points of damage on the webs to clear access to the trap door. Opening it requires a DC 10 Strength check. The trap door leads down to area 12.

Creatures: As soon as a PC enters this area, any swarms still here move to attack. There are enough spiders here to form two swarms. They pursue the characters relentlessly, driven by their hunger to disregard fire, spells, and other attacks.

Spider Swarm (2): hp 9; *Monster Manual* 239.

Development: Note that the swarms found here may have already attacked the party in areas 3 and 4. In that case, there are still dozens of spiders here but not enough to form a swarm.

6. FOOD STORAGE (EL 2)

Thick webbing chokes this room. Bones, shriveled limbs of men and animals, and other gruesome remains dangle from the sticky tangles. Two human-sized bundles hang from the northern wall, while dozens of small spiders scurry about everywhere.

Creatures: A Spot check (DC 10) made here reveals that the two bundles in the webs shudder and shake. Within are two orc zombies, created some time ago by one of the tribe's (now dead) clerics. When Krell killed the zombies' creator, the druid forced the two zombies into this room to keep them out of trouble, since he figured they might some day still have a use. Over the past several months, the zombies have become completely encased in webs from the spider swarms, and they'll remain trapped within unless the PCs unwittingly release them. A DC 16 Strength check or 10 points of slashing or fire damage frees them. The zombies are covered in tiny spiders. They crawl from their mouths and from between the folds of the crude robes they wear. The zombies were orcs in life, so use the stats for human zombies with a +4 bonus to Strength. This change is why the encounter is EL 2, rather than EL 1.

Orc Zombies (2): hp 16, +3 to attacks and damage due to Strength 17; *Monster Manual* 266.

Treasure: One zombie wears gold earrings worth 200 gp, while the second bears a primitive vine necklace set with a green amethyst worth 250 gp.

7. BARRACKS

A crude bed of palm tree fronds stands in this room. Nearby, a wooden, stone-tipped spear and an oblong shield lean against the wall. The shield bears the symbol of a human skull with tiny spiders crawling from its eye sockets. Two human skulls hang from wooden pegs on the wall, and several bones are mixed in with the palm fronds.

This room serves as Krell Grohlg's personal chamber. Since the first squid attack, he has yet to return here. Instead, he spends his time praying in area 10.

8. FIRST MATE'S CABIN

The smashed wreckage of a bed, dresser, and desk covers the floor of this room. Thick webs extend from floor to ceiling, making it impossible to clearly see the wall beyond. Dozens of tiny spiders move through the webs.

This room is empty of treasure or monsters. These spiders pose no threat until the ship begins to sink, as

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We form a sturdy band.
When each is linked to neighbors four,
We form an armor grand.
And when we're carried off to war,
The blade we can withstand.

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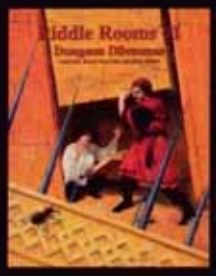

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described below under "The Death of the *Emperor*."

9. SPIDER CHAMBERS

This room is filled with smashed furniture, crushed wooden boxes, and other debris, all covered with thick layers of spider webs.

When the door to this room is opened, dozens of tiny spiders scuttle for cover. As with area 8, the spiders here remain passive until the ship begins to sink as described below.

10. UNHOLY SHRINE (EL 4)

The floor here is covered with runes written in dried blood. A circle has been carved into the floor, while spider webs cover the walls and ceiling. Two humanoid-sized bundles attached to the ceiling writhe as dozens of tiny spiders swarm over them.

Creatures: This is where the PCs are likely to encounter Krell Grohlg, the last survivor of the cultists who escaped the island. The child of an orc high priest and a female human sailor, Krell was once in line to take his father's place as a leader of his people. Now, he seeks to slay as many infidels as possible before facing his own doom upon the seas.

In addition to Krell, a single swarm of spiders lurks in the ceiling here. They crawl down the walls to fall upon the characters from behind regardless of whether they enter this room from the north or south.

Krell is a hulking figure clad in armor crafted from the carapace of some great beetle. He clutches an oblong shield in one hand and a wooden club in the other.

KRELL GROHLG

Krell Grohlg, male half-orc druid 3: CR 3; Medium humanoid; HD 3d8+6; hp 23; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 18, touch 12, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +2; Grp +5; Atk +6 melee (1d6+3, club); SA spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., nature sense, woodland stride, wild empathy +8, trackless step; AL NE; SV Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 14, Cha 15.

Skills: Concentration +8, Handle Animal +8, Spot +8.

Feats: Combat Casting, Lightning Reflexes.

Languages: Common, Orc.

Druid Spells Prepared (caster level 3): 0—*cure minor wounds*, *flare* (DC 12), *read magic*, *resistance*; 1st—*cure light wounds*, *obscuring mist*, *produce flame*; 2nd—*heat metal* (DC 14), *warp wood* (DC 14).

Possessions: Masterwork club, +1 *hide armor*, heavy wooden shield, *hand of the mage*, *Quall's feather token (whip)*, *potion of barkskin (+2)*, *oil of shillelagh*, 3 *potions of cure light wounds*.

Roil, snake animal companion: CR —; Medium animal; HD 4d8+4; hp 22; Init +8; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 14, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +3; Grp +2; Atk or Full Atk +7 melee (1d4–1 plus poison, bite); SA poison (DC 13, 1d6 Con/1d6 Con); SQ link, scent, share spells, evasion; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +8, Will +2; Str 9, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2.

Skills: Balance +12, Climb +12, Hide +15, Listen +7, Spot +7, Swim +7.

Feats: Alertness, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse[B].

Spider Swarm: hp 9; *Monster Manual* 239.

Tactics: Krell attempts to use as many of his spells as possible to fortify himself for a showdown with the party. If he knows the characters are coming, he casts *produce flame*, uses his *potion of barkskin* and his *oil of shillelagh*, then activates the *Quall's feather token* once the PCs enter this chamber. During the battle, he casts *warp wood* on the floor beneath the character that poses the greatest threat. The wooden beam buckles beneath the PC, forcing him to make a DC 14 Reflex save or be trapped in place until he makes a successful DC 10 Strength check to pull free.

Krell's snake animal companion crawls around the edge of the combat in an attempt to either flank anyone who engages Krell or to strike at targets toward the rear of the party.

Treasure: Krell gathered the cultists' ceremonial objects and treasure here. In a wooden box on the western wall is a small trove of coins and items, most of them claimed from the defeated crew years ago. In total, there are 507 gp, 199 sp, a scroll of *gust of wind*, a scroll of *neutralize poison*, a *potion of blur*, a *potion of sanctuary*, and a *cloak of resistance* +1.

11. GALLEY

The door in this room's northern wall is badly damaged. A few rusty iron spikes hold it in place. It must be forced open with either a DC 15 Strength check or a DC 10 Disable Device check.

Judging from the metal stove at the western end of this room, this was once the galley. Now, it is cluttered with bones, debris, and offal. A set of badly damaged metal knives and other cookware hangs from hooks in the ceiling, while the stench of rotting flesh chokes the air. A debris-filled stairway leads up near the stern. Tiny spiders crawl over everything in sight.

The cultists transformed this place into a kitchen for their voyage. As their food stores ran low, several of them barricaded themselves in this room and attempted to seize control of the remaining supplies. For their troubles, the rest of the cultists stormed the room, slew the rebels, and added their corpses to the ship's larder.

The one item of note here is the trap door that leads down to the cargo hold. A DC 10 Search check reveals that the webs covering the floor are newer and thinner by the trap door. If the PCs do 5 points of slashing or fire damage to the webs there, they reveal the trap door. A successful DC 10 Strength check opens the door. The cultists used this door to deliver sacrifices to the ghouls below, but they otherwise left it sealed to prevent the undead from escaping.

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12. CARGO HOLD (EL 3)

This large hold runs the entire length of the ship. Seawater fills this chamber to about waist-depth, while a pile of old, moldering crates cluster against the ship's port hull. The water is dark and murky.

The water level here counts as difficult terrain for Medium creatures, while Small or smaller creatures must swim. Medium creatures may also swim if they so choose.

A successful DC 15 Spot check (or a DC 10 Search check) picks out a single crate marked with a stylized letter "A". This crate holds the box that the PCs seek. Opening the crate requires a DC 12 Strength check. Reduce the DC by 1 for each failed check, as the box slowly comes apart due to age and rot. Any weapon blow that does at least one point of damage after bypassing the crate's hardness 5 is also enough to cause it to fall open.

Creatures: Unfortunately for the PCs, two ghouls hide within the water. A pair of thieves wanted for murder in the *Emperor's* home port stowed away here when The *Emperor* left dock so long ago. When the ship became lost, they starved to death. The cultists found the ghouls when they took over control of the ship. Rather than destroy them, they viewed them as emissaries of their dark gods. Sometimes, they offered living sacrifices to them. The ghouls currently hide in the northern end of the hold, beneath the water.

Ghouls (2): hp 13 each; *Monster Manual* 119.

Tactics: The ghouls try to sneak up on the PCs to attack them from below. They gain a +2 bonus on Hide checks. A paralyzed PC who falls prone must hold his breath or begin to drown.

Treasure: One of the ghouls wears a silver bracelet worth 75 gp, while the other has a gem-studded belt worth 400 gp. The crates and boxes are rotted and the goods within them worthless.

The special box is made of a rare form of magically enhanced iron. Resistant to rust and weapon blows, it is also *arcane locked* at caster level 14; anyone who speaks the password "Tildivarias" (the name of Aubreck's dog from his childhood) can open it without difficulty. It still contains the *cloak of resistance +5* and the three *figurines of wondrous power* (a *bronze griffon*, an *ebony fly*, and a *marble elephant*) he seeks.

THE DEATH OF THE EMPEROR (EL 4)

Only a few hours before the PCs reached the derelict *Emperor*, an old and dying giant squid, too frail to return to the deep, drifted near the ship. Crazed with hunger, it attacked the *Emperor*—the results of this attack are what has caused the ship's list and the numerous leaks that are slowly flooding the hold. Krell managed to calm the crazed squid with a lucky wild empathy check, but the squid did not leave the area. Rather, it's spent the last several hours lurking in the water nearly a 100 feet below. At some point near the climax of this adventure, the squid's hunger and illness drive it back to the surface for a final attack on the *Emperor*.

You should time the squid's second assault on the ship to coincide with the PCs' discovery of the box they're seeking. The squid may be sick and old, but it still represents a very real threat to a group of 2nd-level characters. As the squid attacks, emphasize to the players the chaos around the PCs. Swarms of spiders scramble about in a panic and assemble into ever-growing swarms. The ship's hull creaks and tilts in the water as supports snap and water pours into the hold. Push the PCs to make fast decisions in order to enforce the feel of a panicked flight off a sinking ship.

Once the attack begins, use the following schedule to track the progress of the damage done to the ship.

Round 1: The squid moves into position under the ship. In its sickened state, it releases its ink cloud as it swims, creating a noticeable blot in the water near the ship's stern. A successful DC 15 Spot check made by someone who can see the water allows that person to notice the squid's writhing tentacles in the inky water.

Round 2: The squid begins tearing at the *Emperor's* hull, widening the holes it has already created. Each round, from this point forward, PCs and humanoid monsters aboard the *Emperor* must make DC 10 Balance checks each round or fall prone as the ship rocks back and forth. Also at this point, the tiny spiders aboard begin to panic and swarm out of the ship's woodwork. This creates a new spider swarm in areas 1, 3, and 10. During this time, the squid's tentacles are obvious and can be seen by those outside, and periodically inside as well as it reaches blindly inside the ship.

Round 11: The ship starts taking on water at a rapid rate. Area 12 floods completely. By this point, the giant squid's tentacles have torn enough holes in the ship that it can make blind, groping attacks at creatures on the ship. As a general rule, since it can't see anything, it only attacks targets that attack its tentacles. Remember that the squid suffers a 50% miss chance against creatures it attacks, and it can't make attacks of opportunity (since it can't actually see the PCs while they remain on the ship).

Round 16: Areas 5–11 are now filled half-way with water. Any surviving spider swarms flee to area 1. By this point, the dwarf sailors move their rowboat closer to look for the PCs. The ship lists at a 45° angle to port. Movement now requires successful DC 10 Climb checks. Failure by 5 or more indicates the character slips and falls five feet to port.

Round 21: Areas 5–11 flood completely.

Round 27: The ship sinks beneath the waves, carrying the spiders and the remnants of the Tharzax cult along with it, along with any PCs unfortunate enough to still be on board.

If he still lives, Krell flies into a panic when the squid attacks. If he spots the PCs, he attacks them. Otherwise, he tries again to pacify the giant squid with a wild empathy check. Since the squid is hostile, he must make a DC 20 wild empathy check to successfully make it unfriendly and break off the attack. Any PCs with this ability can

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

Adapting this adventure to different levels of play is rather easy, as you can simply swap out the existing vermin for larger ones and drop or increase the number of ghouls, beetles, and swarms aboard the *Emperor of the Waves*.

1st-Level characters: You can make this an adventure suitable for 1st-level characters by changing the centipede in area **2** to a Medium monstrous spider. Reduce all of the spiders in the adventure by one size category, remove the swarm from area **10**, cut out one of the swarms from area **5**, and place only one ghoul in area **12**.

3rd- and 4th-Level characters: For 3rd- or 4th-level parties, add a second centipede to area **2**, increase all the Medium spiders to Large ones if the encounter area is large enough to allow them to maneuver. Otherwise, double the number of Medium spiders. Add one extra swarm to areas **5** and **10**. Add a second Large spider to area **3**.

do the same, if they wish. In order to make the check, a character must be within 30 feet of the squid and spend one minute. The focus of the squid's misplaced rage remains the ship itself; as long as no PCs attack it, it ignores them and does not make any attacks against them. A group of 2nd-level characters would be well-advised to leave the animal alone.

Sick Old Giant Squid: CR 4; Huge animal (aquatic); HD 12d8–24; hp 30; Init –1; Spd 80 ft.; AC 13, touch 7, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +9; Grp +17; Atk +7 melee (1d6, tentacle); Full Atk +7 melee (1d6, 10 tentacles) and +2 melee (2d8, bite); Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft. (30 ft. with tentacles); SA constrict 1d6, improved grab; SQ ink cloud, jet, low-light vision; SV Fort +6, Ref +7, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 8, Con 6, Int 1, Wis 12, Cha 2; *Monster Manual* 281.

Skills: Listen +10, Spot +10, Swim +11.

Feats: Alertness, Diehard, Endurance, Toughness (2).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If the PCs return Aubreck's box to him, he is overjoyed. With the sale of the items within, he can establish himself anew as a mercantile force within the city. He pays the PCs their promised fee and gladly replaces any items, such as armor or weapons, that they lost in the adventure. Even if they fail, he pays half their fee as he admits that the *Emperor* was in far worse shape than he had been led to believe.

If the PCs succeeded, Aubreck can become a continuing source of adventure. He may dispatch the PCs to avenge the loss of his crew, some of whom may still be alive, or he may need them to accompany the trade voyages he sponsors with his profits. Perhaps he hides sinister motives behind his actions, or maybe he is too greedy and self-centered to do business with the party for long without betraying them. In any case, he owes the PCs a tremendous debt, is well aware of their competence, and may need adventurers to aid him in the future. If he regains his former glory he could become a powerful, well-connected ally.

Mike Mearls began playing D&D in 1981 and has been a full-time freelance RPG designer since 2001. He would like to thank Mait, Toby, Derek, and Adam, the first brave adventurers to set foot aboard The Emperor of the Waves. *Unlike 98% of gamers, he can and will play the cleric. He still can't believe that people pay him to write D&D stuff.*

THE PORTENT

by Peter Bergting

I FINALLY GOT THAT SPRINGBOARD YOU WANTED FOR MOUNT GLOOM INSTALLED!
OH JOY!
I HAVE SO BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS.
EVER SINCE THAT MOVIE!
MT. GLOOM
THIS WAS NOT A GOOD IDEA.

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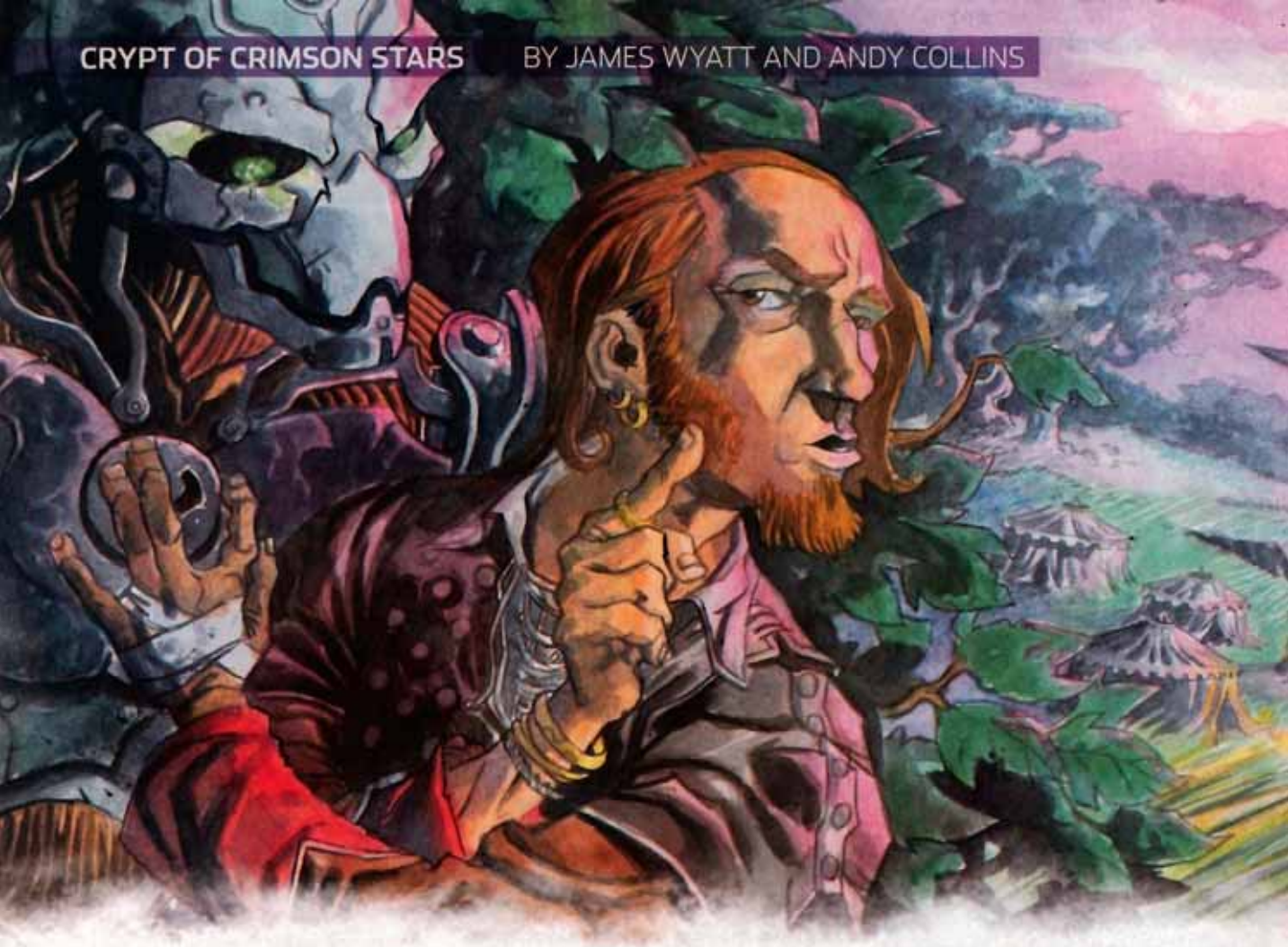

SHARDS OF EBERRON PART 1

Crypt of Crimson Stars

BY JAMES WYATT AND ANDY COLLINS
BY RAMÓN PÉREZ
BY JASON ENGLE

EBERRON, MID-LEVEL (6TH–12TH), TEMPERATE PLAINS AND DUNGEON CRAWL

For centuries the Crypt of Crimson Stars has lain hidden in the vast expanse of the Talenta Plains. Now it has been found, and its legendary lost treasures draw adventurers from across the continent. Can you navigate deadly traps, fearsome guardians, and vengeful nomadic halflings to claim the prize?

"Crypt of Crimson Stars" is an EBERRON adventure designed for four 7th-level characters, scalable for levels 6–9. This adventure is part one of the three-part "Shards of EBERRON" Campaign Arc. This adventure originally appeared as round one of the EBERRON open adventure at Gen Con Indy 2004. While the story continues in the following issues, "Crypt of Crimson Stars" is also easy to run as a stand-alone adventure.

Adventure Background

Lamishal Armare is the last scion of an Aundairian noble family destroyed by Brelish troops during the Last War. Consumed by a burning desire for revenge and presumed dead by the governments of both Breland and Aundair, Lamishal vowed to exact his vengeance upon the people of Breland for the death of his family and the destruction of his estate.

Lamishal enrolled at the wizard academy at Arcanix, funding his education with the last of his family's fortune. While he developed his innate sorcerous talents, he also spent years scouring the arcane libraries at the school for a way to bring destruction to the people of Breland on a massive scale. By the time he graduated ten years later, he had found several possibilities; unfortunately, they were all beyond his current means.

Undeterred, he traveled to the city of Sharn in Breland and sought employment as a sorcerer for hire. Eventually, he worked his way into the confidence of one of the city's most powerful merchants, a man named Tophran Damilek. Tophran is a renowned dealer of dragonshards in Sharn, and Lamishal believed that he could use Tophran to acquire the resources he needed to carry out his devious plan.

Lamishal had uncovered the possible hiding places of several large and powerful dragonshards during his research at Arcanix. He made Tophran an offer; he would share the location of these dragonshards with the merchant, who would use his resources to track them down and bring them back to Sharn. Any resulting profits would be shared equally between the two men, after a deduction had been made for Tophran's expenses. Tophran cautiously agreed to the plan. He did not fully trust Lamishal, but the potential size of these dragonshards was astounding, and his greed eventually got the better of him.

Adventure Synopsis

The PCs are hired by Tophran to obtain a large and powerful dragonshard hidden in a crypt in the Talenta Plains. The party travels to the crypt, where they encounter a nomadic band of halflings that considers the crypt a holy site. The PCs must either persuade the halflings to allow them to enter the crypt, or forcibly drive the nomads from the site before they can explore the cave entrance.

Once inside the crypt, the party must overcome a group of fierce monsters that has taken up residence in the cave and negotiate a series of deadly traps before they face off against the final guardian: a terrifying mummy.

Adventure Hooks

"Crypt of Crimson Stars" begins as the adventurers are hired by Tophran Damilek (LN male human aristocrat 2, expert 6) to recover an extraordinary dragonshard from a crypt deep in the Talenta Plains. The PCs might encounter Tophran in several ways, some of which are outlined below.

- Tophran puts out a call for adventurers that quickly spreads across Sharn. If the PCs are in town and looking for work, a DC 10 Gather Information check points them in Tophrian's direction. Additionally, the Clifftop Guild and the Deathsgate Guild (Adventurer's Guilds introduced in *Sharn: City of Towers*) know about Tophran and can direct the PCs to him.
- Tophran does business with much of the criminal underworld in Sharn. If the PCs are in debt to one of the city's many crime lords, he may ask them to repay the favor by helping out his friend Tophran. Alternately, if one of the PCs is a member of a dragonmarked house, they might be asked to repay a house favor to Tophran.
- The PCs might be in the market for a rare or unusual dragonshard item themselves. Trophan is the best known dragonshard dealer in the city, and one of the few that deals in exotic and powerful dragonshards. He could request that the PCs perform a service for him as part of their payment.

CHAPTER ONE: TOPHRAN DAMILEK

Whatever reason the PCs have for seeking out Tophran, he can be found in his office in the Everbright district of Middle Menthis. If the PCs arrive during daylight hours when his office is open, they are greeted by his secretary, an elderly gnome by the name of Ezala Whitelash (LN female gnome commoner 2). After a brief wait, the PCs are shown into Tophran's office.

Tophran's office is lavishly decorated, but surprisingly small. The main feature of the room is an enormous desk, which looks as though it is made of densewood and must have cost a small fortune. Several couches and stuffed armchairs dot the remainder of the room, while the walls are decorated with rich tapestries and beautifully illustrated landscapes. A pervading sense of organized chaos fills the room. The desk is cluttered with several piles of papers, while most of the paintings hang slightly crooked. The faint smell of cinnamon hangs in the musty air.

Tophran is a small, middle-aged man with white hair and a bushy mustache. He introduces himself to the PCs and offers them some refreshments before inviting them to take a seat. He pulls a wrinkled piece of parchment from one of the piles on his desk and launches into his proposition.

"Here it is, the Crypt of Crimson Stars. Inside this crypt is the legendary Crimson Dragonshard. Supposedly the largest Eberron dragonshard ever discovered, but of course we can't be sure of that, as it hasn't been seen in a long time. You will travel to his crypt marked on the map, search it, and bring the dragonshard back to me. For this, I will present you with a reward of two thousand gold. Do you have any questions?"

Tophran then hands the PCs a faded map of the northern Talenta Plains. A large crimson star has been marked on the map on the southern edge of a small lake a few days' journey north of Gatherhold. Tophran is prepared to answer questions as follows.

How are we supposed to get to the Talenta Plains? "I will arrange transport for you to and from Gatherhold. After that, you are on your own."

How did you find out about this dragonshard? "The dragonshard hidden within the Crypt of Crimson Stars is legendary for its supposed size and power. The exact location of the crypt has been a mystery for hundreds of years, and was only recently uncovered by one of my close associates."

How do you know that this dragonshard is still there? "Well, one can never be completely sure, but assuming it was there in the first place, I am confident it still is. The location of this crypt was extremely obscure, and if a dragonshard of such size and power had turned up anywhere in Khorvaire, I would know about it."

Two thousand gold is not enough, can you offer more? Tophran is reluctant to offer more than his stated reward, but a DC 25 Diplomacy check can persuade him to go as high as 2,500 gp.

When do we leave? "If you come back tomorrow morning, that should give me enough time to book your transportation."

The Journey to the Talenta Plains

Tophran is well connected with all of the dragonmarked houses, as he provides most of the dragonshards that make many of their activities possible. His relationship with House Lyrandar and House Orien allows him to utilize both the airship and lightning rail systems for a fraction of the normal cost.

It's a five-day journey by airship to Korth in Karrnath. From there, the PCs can take the lightning rail to Gatherhold in three more days. While encounters on the journey from Sharn to Talenta are certainly possible, they are beyond the scope of this adventure.

CHAPTER TWO: HALFLINGS

The most direct route from Gatherhold to the crypt will bring the PCs to the southern edge of the halfling campsite encounter map. The halflings form a nomadic tribe that travels throughout the Talenta Plains following the indigenous triceratops herds. This particular tribe of halflings has been camped on the bluff overlooking the crypt

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for the past two weeks. They consider the cave entrance a holy site, and are currently in the process of performing a series of rituals venerating the nature spirit that they believe dwells within the crypt. These rituals last for another two weeks before the halflings break camp and continue their endless trek across the plains.

Halfling Scouts (EL 3)

The gentle stream empties into a placid lake ahead. A lone hill juts up from lakeshore, with a gradual slope on the south side and a steeper slope on the west. A tiny clump of trees grows on the top of the hill, and scattered patches of brush cling to the slope. On the summit of the hill, a thin stream of smoke rises into the sky. A slight ridge runs parallel to the slope of the hill on the opposite side of the stream-crowned with some shrubbery.

Creatures: Four halfling scouts mounted on velociraptors (known as "Clawfeet" to the halflings) patrol the western and southern sides of the bluff, making a circuit every 30 minutes or so. If they spot the PCs, one of them immediately rides off to notify the rest of the camp, while the other three cautiously approach. The halflings consider the entire area around the bluff to be holy ground, and insist that the PCs leave immediately.

If their initial attitude of unfriendly is adjusted to indifferent (DC 15 Diplomacy check) the halflings agree to escort the PCs back to their campsite to meet with the leader of their tribe. If the PCs mention that they are looking for the Crypt of Crimson Stars or that they are here to recover an artifact from the cave, they take a –10 penalty on their Diplomacy check.

If the PCs fail to improve the halflings' attitude after a couple minutes of negotiation and refuse to leave the area, the scouts open fire.

Halfling scout 5 (4): CR 5; Small humanoid; HD 5d8+10; hp 36; Init +5; Spd 30 ft.; AC 20, touch 15, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +3; Grp –1; Atk/Full Atk +5 melee (1d6/×3, masterwork longspear) or +9 ranged (1d4/×3, +1 *composite shortbow*); SA skirmish (+2d6, +1 AC); SQ battle fortitude +1, evasion, fast movement +10 ft., halfling traits, trackless step, trapfinding, uncanny dodge; AL CN; SV Fort +5, Ref +9, Will +3; Str 11, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills: Hide +15, Knowledge (nature) +7, Listen +11, Move Silently +13, Ride +12, Sense Motive +4, Spot +9, Survival +11, Tumble +11.

Feats: Mounted Combat, Mounted Archery, Track[B].

Languages: Common, Halfling.

Battle Fortitude (Ex): The halflings receive a +1 competence bonus on Fortitude saves and initiative checks.

Skirmish (Ex): The halflings deal an extra 2d6 points of damage on all attacks they make during any round in which they move at least 10 feet. The extra damage applies only to attacks taken during the scout's turn. Any creature that is immune to sneak attack damage is also immune to skirmish damage. They can apply this damage to ranged attacks made while skirmishing, but only if the

target is within 30 feet. The scouts also get a +1 competence bonus to Armor Class during any round in which they move at least 10 feet. The bonus applies as soon as they move 10 feet and lasts until the start of their next turn.

Possessions: +1 *chain shirt*, +1 *composite shortbow* with 40 arrows, masterwork longspear.

The scout class first appeared in *Complete Adventurer*.

Velociraptors (Clawfoot dinosaurs) (4): CR 2; Medium animal; HD 2d8+4; hp 13; Init +3; Spd 40 ft.; AC 16, touch 13, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +1; Grp +4; Atk +4 melee (1d8+3, talons); Full Atk +4 melee (1d8+3, talons) and –1 melee (1d3+1, 2 foreclaws) and –1 melee (1d6+1, bite); SA —; SQ low-light vision, scent; AL N; SV Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +1; Str 17, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 2, Wis 12, Cha 10; *Eberron Campaign Setting* 279.

Skills: Hide +12, Jump +20, Listen +10, Spot +10, Survival +10.

Feats: Run.

Tactics: If combat erupts, the halflings do their best to maintain their distance from their opponents, either circling them or moving parallel to them so they can fire on the move and still be within 30 feet to do skirmish damage. If their mounts are attacked, they attempt to use Mounted Combat to negate the first hit each round. If they are forced into melee combat, they attempt to skirmish with their longspears, if possible flanking at the same time. If its rider falls, his mount continues to ferociously attack whoever dropped him. If two of the scouts fall, the remaining one flees back to the encampment.

Development: If the PCs approach the crypt from across the lake, or manage to sneak past the scouts, they could reach the cave without ever encountering the halflings. Unless they take great care in covering their tracks, however, the scouts notice their tracks while the PCs are inside the crypt. The halflings don't enter the cave themselves (to do so would violate their religious beliefs). However, they are waiting in ambush when the trespassers finally emerge from within the crypt.

Halfling Campsite (EL 10)

A small encampment sits at the top of this hill. Reeds and brush are laid out on the ground surrounding the campfire to form makeshift mattresses. A large stack of firewood is piled off to one side, and across from it rest two large barrels of water and smoked meat.

Creatures: Six halfling warriors and a halfling ranger are camped here, along with the four halfling scouts. This tribe of halflings in unusual in that they have managed to rear a tyrannosaurus (called a swordtooth titan by the halflings) to aid them in their hunting. They distrust and fear outsiders, and are quite upset to find them here at one of their holy sites.

If their initial attitude of unfriendly can be changed to indifferent with a DC 15 Diplomacy check, the halflings permit the outsiders to remain in the area for a few hours, as long as they allow a halfling warrior to escort them to ensure that they do not desecrate the holy site. If the PCs manage to adjust their attitude to friendly or better (DC 25 Diplomacy check) they dispense with the escort. Once again, if the PCs mention the Crypt of Crimson Stars, or say that they are looking to retrieve something from the area, they get a –10 penalty on their Diplomacy checks.

Moonlight, female Halfling ranger 6: CR 5; Small humanoid; HD 6d8+18; hp 48; Init +3; Spd 20 ft.; AC 19, touch 14, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +6; Grp +2; Atk +8 melee (1d6/19–20, masterwork longsword) or +12 ranged (1d6/×3, +1 *longbow*) or +8/+8 ranged (1d6/×3 +1 *longbow* using Manyshot); Full Atk +8/+3 melee (1d6/19–20, masterwork longsword) or +8/+8 ranged (1d6/×3 +1 *longbow* using Manyshot) or +10/+10/+5 (1d6/×3 +1 *longbow* using Rapid Shot); SA favored enemy (animal +4, humanoid [elf] +2), spells; SQ halfling traits, wild empathy +7; AL CN; SV Fort +10, Ref +10, Will +5; Str 10, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 8.

Skills: Handle Animal +13, Hide +11, Listen +12, Move Silently +9, Ride +13, Spot +10, Survival +10.

Feats: Endurance[B], Manyshot[B], Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Rapid Shot[B], Track[B], Weapon Focus (longbow).

Languages: Common, Halfling.

Ranger Spells Prepared (caster level 3): 1st—*entangle* (DC 12), *longstrider*.

Possessions: +1 *mithral shirt*, +1 *longbow*, 40 arrows, masterwork longsword, *cloak of resistance* +1, *potion of darkvision*.

Browny, owl animal companion: hp 13; *Monster Manual* 277.

Halfling warrior 1 (6): CR 1/2; Small humanoid; HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; Spd 20 ft.; AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +1; Grp –3; Atk/Full Atk +2 melee (1d6/19–20, longsword) or +4 ranged (1d6/19–20, masterwork light crossbow); SA —; SQ halfling traits; AL CN; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills: Handle Animal +5, Ride +7.

Feats: Animal Affinity.

Languages: Common, Halfling.

Possessions: Studded leather, buckler, masterwork light crossbow, 40 bolts.

Cutface the Tyrannosaurus: hp 180; *Monster Manual* 61.

Tactics: If combat breaks out, Cutface charges into melee while the rest of the halflings stay back and use missile weapons if possible. Note that if the four scouts are included with this group, it is an EL 11 encounter. The PCs should get the impression that trying to fight all the halflings at once along with their dinosaurs is extremely dangerous.

Development: If the PCs talk or sneak their way past the halflings, there is a good chance that either Moonlight or one of the scouts picks up their trail and tracks them into the crypt. If this happens, the halflings prepare an ambush outside the cave exit for when the PCs emerge, taking positions on the hillside overlooking the cave. None of the halflings know about the secret exit (see area 3 below). That exit opens out in the middle of the upper bluff, so if the PCs are careful, they may be able to sneak out of the crypt and avoid the ambush.

CHAPTER THREE: INSIDE THE CRYPT

The Crypt of Crimson Stars was constructed in the distant past by a long dead race of humanoids. The interior of

the crypt has been carved out of solid rock, and shaped to be perfectly smooth, even, and impossible to climb. Inside, the air is perfectly still and unusually cold. The air is heavy with moisture from the nearby lake, but despite the atmosphere, nothing grows inside the crypt.

1. Chamber of Monsters (EL 3)

Inside the cave opening is a carved stone passage, clearly not a natural formation. The wide passage slopes sharply down into the hillside, with a strange scorching on the flagstone floor. After about ten feet, the passage opens into an odd-shaped room containing six pillars supporting a high domed ceiling, and a number of alcoves off to each side. Underneath the archway leading out of the room on the far side a charred corpse lies on the ground.

The scorching on the floor is from the *lightning bolt* discharged by trap A in area 2, which is also responsible for the corpse. In addition, the tracks of three Medium humanoids (from a previous group of adventurers sent here by Tophran Damilek) can be found in the scorched area with a DC 20 Survival check.

Creatures: A manticore recently settled in this cave, feasting on the game in the surrounding area. The manticore is only the most obvious opponent in the room, however. Three of the eight alcoves on the sides of the room hold extremely hungry gricks. The gricks were the original inhabitants of this cave, but were driven back into the alcoves by the arrival of the manticore. They haven't eaten in several days, but they are terrified of the manticore and don't leave their alcoves unless they sense food directly in front of them. If the manticore is killed, or a PC steps in front of one of their alcoves, however, the gricks spring forth into the room and attack until slain.

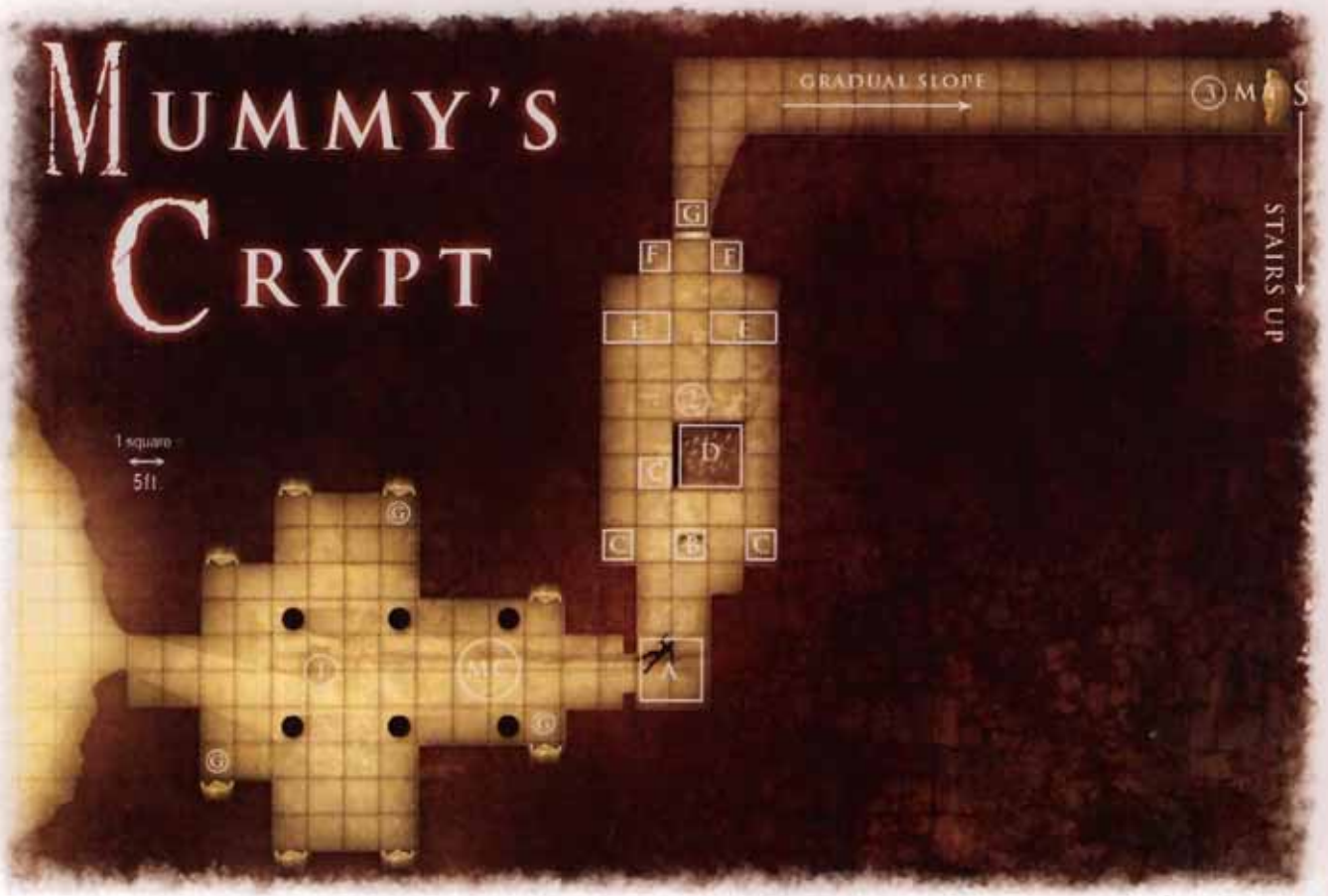
- **Gricks (3):** hp 9; *Monster Manual* 139.
- **Manticore:** hp 57; *Monster Manual* 179.

Tactics: Though the manticore can't see the entrance to the cave (due to the slope), it immediately attacks any PC reaching the final 10 feet of the entry passage. It initiates combat with a volley of tail spikes. Note that the room is too cramped for the manticore to fly in anything but a straight line.

Development: The monsters pursue the PCs if they flee outside the cave, but they don't venture deeper into the crypt.

2. The Crimson Crypt (EL 3)

The corridor once again opens into a larger chamber. The ceiling arches into a dome rising twenty feet above the ground. Scattered across the dome, hundreds of red points of light spread in dozens of distinct constellations twinkle faintly, dimly lighting the stone room. By the faint glow of these crimson stars, you can make out a stone statue in the shape of a leaping dinosaur standing in the center of the room. Beyond the statue, a pit in the floor drops away into blackness. On the far side of the room another body lies on the stone in front of the door that seems to be the room's only other exit.



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This room contains a series of deadly traps, as well as the corpses of the last adventurers who sought the dragonshard. It also holds a deadly curse, tied to the crimson stars in the ceiling. These stars posses two powerful enchantments. The first is a permanent *deeper darkness* spell, which pervades the entire room. This effect functions at caster level 20. The second enchantment is a powerful curse that was placed upon the crypt when it was completed. Anyone who dies beneath the glow of the crimson stars rises the next round as a cursed spirit: a foul incorporeal undead monster devoted to protecting the crypt from invaders. This is the fate that befell the previous group of adventurers.

Creatures: The accursed souls of the dead adventurers now occupy this room.

Cursed spirit (3): CR 3; Medium undead (incorporeal); HD 3d12+3; hp 22; Init +2; Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +1; Grp —; Atk +3 melee (1d8+1, incorporeal touch); SA accursed touch, curse aura; SQ darkvision 60 ft., incorporeal traits, undead traits; AL CN; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +2; Str —, Dex 14, Con —, Int 9, Wis 8, Cha 13; *Miniatures Handbook* 60.

Skills: Intimidate +7, Listen +5, Spot +5.

Feats: Toughness, Weapon Finesse.

Accursed Touch (Su): A cursed spirit adds its Charisma modifier to damage dealt by its incorporeal touch attack.

Curse Aura (Su): The taint of loss surrounds a cursed spirit. Enemy creatures within 5 ft. take a –2 penalty on all saving throws.

Language: Common.

Tactics: The cursed spirit near Trap A remains inert in the body until the PCs have passed it, at which time it rises and attempts to goad them into the subsequent traps.

The cursed spirit in the corpse in Trap D (the pit) flies up when any character peers (or falls) into the pit. This spirit (and the one from area A, if it is not yet destroyed) tries to goad the characters toward trap E.

When any character approaches within 10 feet of the corpse lying in front of the door marked G, the third cursed spirit arises from the corpse and attacks (making a 5-foot adjustment if needed).

Traps: Of the seven traps in this room, six are still active.

Trap A is triggered when any character enters the 10-foot square beyond the arch (either on foot or in the air). The trap shoots a *lightning bolt* down the line connecting the center of the trigger area with the archway leading outside the crypt. It automatically resets itself after 1d4 rounds (during which time a high-pitched whine fills the area).

The stone statue (Trap B) depicts a life-sized velociraptor in mid-leap, the claws on its toes extended. When any character moves adjacent to the statue, these claw-blades swing around to strike nearby characters (this also activates Trap C). The hidden lock that bypasses this trap also bypasses trap C.

Trap C, activated simultaneously with Trap B, sends whirling poisoned blades slicing through each marked square every round for 10 rounds after Trap B activates.

Trap D is obvious: the spiked pit trap has already been triggered and still stands open, since it requires a manual reset.

Trap E activates when any character enters one of the squares marked E. Once a square has been activated, it is safe to pass through. Note that a safe path already exists past this trap (thanks to the work of one of the previous adventurers).

Any character entering a square adjacent to the exit door triggers Trap F, which fires spears at all characters in the 5-ft.-by-15-ft. area in front of the door.

Trap G affects any character that touches the handle of the door leading out of this room with contact poison.

Lightning trap (trap A): CR 3; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); automatic reset (1d4 rounds delay); spell effect (*lightning bolt*, 10th-level wizard, 10d6 electricity, DC 14 Reflex half); Search DC 28; Disable Device DC 28.

Statue trap (trap B): CR 3; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; hidden lock bypass (Search DC 25, Open Lock DC 30); Atk +16 melee (2d4+8/×4); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

Poison blades trap (trap C): CR 5; mechanical; location trigger; automatic reset; hidden lock bypass (Search DC 25, Open Lock DC 30); Atk +10 melee (1d4/19–20); multiple targets (all targets in one of the areas marked on the map); poison (Fort DC 24 resists, 1d6 Str/2d6 Str); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20.

Pit trap (trap D): CR 2; mechanical; location trigger (already triggered); manual reset; 40 ft. deep (4d6 fall); pit spikes (Atk +10 melee, 1d4 spikes per target for 1d4+4 each); Search DC —; Disable Device DC 20.

Phantasmal trap (trap E): CR 4; magic device; proximity trigger (*alarm*); no reset; spell effect (*phantasmal killer*, 7th-level wizard, Will DC 16 negates, Fort DC 16 partial); Search DC 29; Disable Device DC 29.

Spears trap (trap F): CR 6; mechanical; location trigger; manual reset; Atk +21 ranged (1d8); multiple targets (1d6 spears per target in the affected area); Search DC 26; Disable Device DC 20.

Doorknob trap (trap G): CR 4; mechanical; touch trigger (attached); no reset; poison (Fort DC 16 resists, 2d12 hp/1d6 Con); Search DC 27; Disable Device DC 16.

3. Keeper of the Shard (EL 3)

Beyond the bend, the passage slopes sharply downward. At the far end, a stone sarcophagus leans against the wall, resting in an upright position.

The mummy's sarcophagus is actually built into the stone wall (though it appears separate), and is designed to sink into the wall when pushed by the stone block (see Trap below), opening a secret door in the back wall through which the mummy could escape. A DC 22 Search check reveals the existence of the secret door, and that the sarcophagus is supposed to move into the wall. It can be opened either with a DC 15 Disable Device check or a DC 20 Strength check to push the sarcophagus into the wall ahead of the sliding block. Up to three characters can aid the character making the Strength check. Beyond the secret door, a long stairway leads back up to a secret exit

hidden in the underbrush on the ridge south of the halfling camp site.

Creature: Inside the sarcophagus is the dragonshard's final guardian, an ancient mummy. When any PC comes within 20 feet, the mummy pushes the lid off the sarcophagus (forcing all characters who can see it to make immediate saving throws against its despair ability). Any character who can see the mummy can also identify the Eberron dragonshard hanging on a gold pendant around its neck.

Mummy: hp 55; *Monster Manual* 190.

Possessions: The Crimson Dragonshard.

Trap: One round after the sarcophagus opens, a heavy stone block at the upper end of the passage begins to slowly slide down the sloping corridor. It moves 20 feet down the corridor each round. Once the trap is triggered, the PCs have four rounds to defeat the mummy and escape before the block crushes them against the wall.

Sliding block trap: CR 6; mechanical; manual trigger (inside the mummy's sarcophagus); repair reset; block slides down the hallway (12d6 crush); multiple targets (all targets within the corridor); never miss; onset delay (4 rounds); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 22.

Treasure: The sarcophagus contains a polished silver helmet engraved with dancing crickets worth 800 gp, a masterwork small steel shield, a +1 *scimitar*, an *amulet of natural armor* +1, and a small chest containing 535 sp, 223 gp, and 56 pp.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Assuming the PCs manage to get past the halflings, out of the cave, and back to civilization, they can use the return tickets given them by Tophran to retrace their steps all the way back to Sharn. Tophran is happy to hand over the promised reward (somewhere between 2,000 gp and 2,500 gp depending on how successful the PCs were in bargaining).

If you are playing "Crypt of Crimson Shards" as a stand-alone adventure, Tophran thanks the PCs for their service and sends them on their way. He views the encounter as "strictly business," although he is happy to procure any dragonshard items the PCs might have been looking for.

If you intend to continue the "Shards of Eberron" Campaign Arc, Tophran has an exciting new proposal for the PCs upon their return. It seems that another rare dragonshard, even larger than the first, is hidden somewhere on the mysterious continent of Xen'Drik. For more details, be sure to check out "Temple of the Scorpion God," in *Dungeon* 124.

When he's not writing D&D books at his day job as an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, James Wyatt works on an Eberron novel for Wizards of the Coast. When he's not doing that, he spends precious little time with his wife and 8-year-old son. And when he's not doing that, he's playing entirely too much World of Warcraft. Once in a while, he'll post something on his website at aquela.com, usually about how busy he is. Only when all the rest is done does he sleep. Next time you see him, buy him a venti mocha Valencia at the nearest Starbucks.

When not planning new fiendish ways to destroy player characters, Andy Collins works as an RPG developer for Wizards of the Coast. He lives in Washington with his wife, RPG designer Gwendolyn F.M. Kestrel, and their two noisy half-Siamese cats. He also occasionally updates his website, www.andycollins.net.

Scaling the Adventure

"Crypt of Crimson Stars" is designed for a group of four 7th-level characters, but with a little work it can be adapted for use by 6th-level characters or 8th–9th-level characters. Simply adjust all NPC character levels up or down as appropriate by a number equal to that which the average party level of your group deviates from 7. Don't forget to modify the amount of treasure found in the adventure appropriately. Specific changes to the adventure include:

6th-Level Parties: Replace the halfling's tyrannosaurus with a megaraptor. Remove one of the gricks from area 1. Reduce the Search and Disable Device DCs of all the traps in the adventure by 2.

8th–9th-Level Parties: If the scouts discover the PCs, have them return for reinforcements at once so the halflings fight the PCs as a group. Advance the tyrannosaurus by 3–6 HD. Increase the Search and Disable Device DCs for the traps in the adventure by 1–3. Finally, give the mummy at the end of the adventure 1 or 2 levels of cleric.

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THE AMARANTHA AGENDA

BY PHILLIP LARWOOD
BY PETER BERGTING
BY JASON ENGLE

ANY SETTING, HIGH-LEVEL (13TH–20TH), TEMPERATE FOREST

What happens when a sinister conjurer catches a dryad and manages to bind her fey spirit to a carnivorous tree from the Abyss? The caretakers of Hanali's Cradle found out the hard way—can the PCs reclaim this sacred elven site from its corrupted mistress before she extends her powers even further?

"The Amarantha Agenda" is a D&D adventure for four 13th-level PCs. The adventure features strong themes of nature against corruption, so druids, rangers, and other characters with supernatural ties to the natural world are especially suited to this adventure. "The Amarantha Agenda" can be set in just about any forested location in the FORGOTTEN REALMS, EBERRON, or other campaign world without difficulty.

Adventure Background

Helmwood is a large hardwood forest populated by several thousand elves and their centaur and fey allies. Yet not all of the denizens of Helmwood are kind and capricious. For many years a powerful wizard named Turlath lurked in the most remote reaches of the forest. The elves have resisted the advances of Turlath's army of demonically-infused plants, and with the aid of several watchtowers and holy sites they ultimately managed to hedge the wizard and his minions into a relatively small section of the wood. They were never able to completely destroy him, as the defenses in his lair were quite formidable. But as long as their hedge held, Turlath was unable to expand further into Helmwood.

One of these watchtowers was actually a sacred site built by the fey creatures of the forest, a site infused with the ambient forces of nature. This location came to be known as Hanali's Cradle, after the elven god of nature. A powerful nymph druid gifted the site with a magical instrument called the *Greenbond Harp* that could be used to draw upon these energies to infuse the music's subject with this ambient magic, allowing a full transformation into a creature of nature known as a woodling.

In the end, Turlath's greatest enemy proved to be himself. After capturing a dryad named Amarantha, he used his infernal magic to not only transform her into a half-fiend dryad, but also bonded her soul to an Abyssal tree known as an ironmaw. Amarantha loathed what Turlath had done to her, and when she discovered she could manipulate the fiendish energy Turlath had infested her with, she secretly honed her skills until finally she was able to destroy Turlath and much of his work. In the ruins of his deep forest hideaway, she searched for a method to expunge the fiendish corruption from her body, but everything she found suggested her transformation was permanent.

So Amarantha began searching instead for ways to infuse her body with the natural world, hoping to dilute her corruption with an "overdose" of nature. And now, her investigation has led her to Hanali's Cradle.

Adventure Synopsis

The elves of the town of Evistar have always depended on Hanali's Cradle to protect them from the evil wizard Turlath. Yet recently, a terrible mass of corrupted plant monsters attacked the town with dreadful success. The creatures were defeated, but the town was lost. The surviving elves beg the PCs to travel to Hanali's Cradle to determine what's happened. Once the PCs reach the outpost, they must contend with Amarantha and her vicious minions, including her bonded ironmaw.

Adventure Hooks

This adventure assumes that the PCs are either traveling through Helmwood and happen to come upon Evistar by chance, or that they are contacted by the elven ranger Kalarinth, who either knows the PCs by reputation or has a prior relationship with one of them. In this case, Kalarinth uses an *animal messenger* to contact the PCs with a call for aid after the attack on Evistar. In the message, he explains that Evistar has been destroyed by corrupted plant monsters and that the elves are abandoning the town, but that he would like the PCs to investigate Hanali's Cradle and find out why the watchtower failed to protect and alert Evistar of the attack.

If this adventure hook won't work for your campaign, consider one of the following hooks instead.

- Either one of the party's spellcasting patrons or one of the PCs need a rare material component for a magic item or spell they are researching. Whatever this item may be, the closest location where it can be found is Helmwood. The PCs must travel there and visit the town of Evistar to gain the component.
- While researching related magic pertaining to the natural world, one of the PCs finds reference to Hanali's Cradle, a location in Helmwood where it is said that the ambient magical energies of the natural world are concentrated. Legend holds that a magic harp kept at Hanali's Cradle can infuse those who play it with this magical energy. A character looking to gain more powers from such a source would do well to investigate.

THE RAZING OF EVISTAR

Evistar once shone like a glistening emerald in the heart of the forest, yet now, the town lies in ruin. Great trees shaped into living homes by the elves and fey that dwelt in this magical town now lie shattered into kindling by some terrible force. The elves who survived the disaster now sift through the rubble of their homes, morosely looking for anything that survived and hoping to find loved ones that remain trapped in the rubble. Dozens of elf corpses lie scattered on the pale green floor of the forest like windblown leaves, their bodies riddled with thorns. Near the center of the ruined town, a large number of mourning elves have gathered around a smoking pyre, atop which burns a figure laid upon a bier of wood. Elsewhere, massive mounds of foul-smelling and rapidly decaying plant matter steam and bubble in the sunlight.

When Amarantha slew Turlath, she did more than merely kill an evil wizard. She unleashed a terrible scourge of corrupted plant monsters into Helmwood. This unspeakable blight has slowly grown as the creatures once imprisoned in Turlath's fortress escape, one at a time. The elves of Evistar have long known of the threat Turlath posed, but they also relied on the numerous watch posts like Hanali's Cradle to protect them and warn them of peril. When Amarantha took the Cradle and killed its guardians, she robbed Evistar of its closest warden. And when the legion of plant monsters that followed came upon the town, they destroyed it. Half-fiend treants, fiendish shambling mounds, and sporebats made short work of the town's structures and slew many elves. They were themselves defeated by the town's defenders, even though Evistar's most powerful druid, a man named Rokuras Rivergreen, perished in the battle. The mounds of rapidly decaying plant matter are the bodies of these monsters, the process of decomposition accelerated by their tainted natures.

The town now lies in ruin, and its leaders have decided to abandon it. When the PCs arrive, the elves are busy sifting through the rubble in search of any valuables or survivors they can take with them on their retreat. The mood here is of despair and sadness; the majority of the elves do not react to the party's arrival at all, choosing instead to focus on their grim task. Of the town's population of 930 elves, only 24 survived

Before long, the PCs are approached by an elf in strange armor crafted from bark. This is Kalarinth Eshaldron (NG male elf ranger 10), the only survivor of Evistar's leaders. If he called the PCs using an *animal messenger* spell, he greets them somberly. Otherwise, he asks a few questions to determine who they are, what their business is in Evistar, and if they're interested in doing him an important service.

Kalarinth explains to the PCs that the elves have long known that corrupted plant monsters like these lurk in the wood's depths, but that they have a large number of outposts and watchtowers surrounding the tainted section of woods, and that normally these outposts can contain the creatures. At the very least, the tower guardians are charged with raising an alarm to warn the nearby elven towns. The closest tower to Evistar is a holy site known as Hanali's Cradle. Evistar received no warning of the attack from the Cradle, and Kalarinth wants to know why. He fears that the Cradle has been captured or corrupted, the possibility of which portends dire developments for the rest of Helmwood since Hanali's Cradle is also a sacred site infused with powerful elven magic.

Kalarinth's primary charge is to see to the safe evacuation of Evistar's refugees to another elven settlement. As such, he has no time or resources to investigate the situation at Hanali's Cradle, and hopes the PCs take up this task for him. If they agree, he gives them directions to the Cradle and warns them that

if the Cradle has fallen to the enemy, they have in their control a potent magical harp that can be used to harness and focus the site's ambient natural magic. If the PCs ask for or demand payment for their services, Kalarinth appears crestfallen but promises them he'll see what he can do. He does mention that the magical harp at the Cradle can be used to infuse one's self with great natural power, and if they can make sure that the site is not under the enemy's control, they might be able to take advantage of this source of power.

If the PCs think to ask, Kalarinth tells them that three elven rangers guard Hanali's Cradle. If they don't ask, Kalarinth doesn't think to tell them this, since he has no way of knowing Amarantha may try to deceive the PCs once they reach the Cradle.

Traveling to Hanali's Cradle (EL 13)

Hanali's Cradle is three miles southeast of Evistar, in an area of medium woodland with sparse trees but relatively thick undergrowth. While this is a relatively short distance, the region has grown rather dangerous in the short amount of time since Amarantha claimed the site as her own.

Since it's unlikely the PCs have ever visited Hanali's Cradle before, *teleport* won't allow them to save time. *Greater teleport* works, since Kalarinth can provide a reliable description of the Cradle's location. Likewise, *transport via plants* can allow for quick travel to the site.

Travel by ground is via a slightly-overgrown forest trail that doesn't impact overland movement rates, so a party moving at a speed of 30 feet can reach the Cradle in about an hour. Flight works as well. The Cradle itself is in a clearing and thus quite visible from the air if the PCs simply travel southeast from Evistar and keep their eyes open.

Creatures: When the PCs travel to Hanali's Cradle, they'll run afoul of some of the fiendish plant monsters that lurk in the area, stragglers from the assault on Evistar that have been foraging in the region.

If the PCs travel overland, they are ambushed by a group of advanced fiendish shambling mounds that rise up from the undergrowth. A successful Spot or Listen check allows characters to react in the ensuing surprise round as the shambling mounds close to melee distance. If the PCs instead travel by air, their flight arouses the interest of a group of sporebats that lurks high in the branches of Helmwood's taller trees. A sporebat is a fungoid predator that resembles a dark gray bat made of spongy material. A large, lidless eye gazes out from the center of the creature's body. Standing three feet high with an eight-foot wingspan, a sporebat's two legs and tail end in viciously hooked claws. They communicate with a strange, high-pitched language that is unintelligible to non-sporebats.

Fiendish shambling mounds (4): CR 9; Large plant (extraplanar); HD 12d8+36; hp 90 each; Init +4; Spd 20 ft., swim 20 ft.; AC 20, touch 9, flat-footed 20; Base Atk +9; Grp +18; Atk +13 melee (3d6+5, slam); Full Atk +13 melee (3d6+5, 2 slams); SA improved grab, constrict 2d6+7, smite good 1/day (+12 damage); SQ darkvision 60 ft., immunity to electricity, low-light vision, plant traits, damage reduction 10/magic, resistance to cold and fire 10, spell resistance 17; AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +4, Will +6; Str 21, Dex 10, Con 17, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 9.

Skills: Hide +5 (+13 in swampy or forested areas), Listen +9, Move Silently +9.

Feats: Improved Natural Attack (slam), Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (slam).

Sporebats (3): CR 10; Medium plant; HD 15d8+30; hp 97 each; Init +9; Spd 5 ft., fly 60 ft. (good); AC 15, touch 15, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +11; Grp +13; Atk +13 melee (1d4+2, claw); Full Atk +13 melee (1d4+2, 2 claws) and +8 melee (1d4+1, tail rake); SA enervation ray (+16 ranged touch); SQ camouflage, fire immunity, plant traits, low-light vision, silent; AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +5; Str 14, Dex 21, Con 15, Int 8, Wis 11, Cha 4; *Fiend Folio* 161.

Skills: Listen +2, Spot +20.

Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Power Attack.

Enervation ray (Su): A sporebat can fire a brown ray every other round at any target within 150 feet. The ray functions as an *enervation* spell cast by a 12th-level sorcerer.

Camouflage (Ex): During any condition of illumination other than daylight, a sporebat can disappear into shadows, giving it total concealment (50% miss chance). Artificial illumination, or any light spell, negates this effect.

Silent (Ex): Sporebats move in absolute silence and make no noise.

Hanali's Cradle (EL 15)

A wondrous sight fills this woodland clearing. Rising above the surrounding woods are three symmetrically arranged enormous trees whose upper branches have grown together to create a platform fifty feet above the ground. An octagonal building with a roof of leaf-shaped shingles sits on this platform, while encircling the platform's edge is a railing of razor-sharp thorns. The structure glistens wetly as if it had recently rained, despite the fact that the surrounding vegetation is dry. A fourth tree grows to one side of these three—this is the only other tree in the clearing, and its twisted branches and mottled leaves seem to indicate it may be diseased.

Hanali's Cradle, although currently inhabited by Amarantha, retains its soothing and powerful magical aura, a direct manifestation of the focus of natural magic in the clearing. All druid and ranger spells, as well as spells from the Animal and Plant clerical domains, are automatically heightened by 1 spell level (as if by the Heighten Spell metamagic feat) if cast in the clearing. You may also include spells cast from other nature-themed classes or domains as you see fit. In addition, all saving throw DCs from the supernatural abilities of fey increase by 1 in this area.

The trees that support the small building are also infused with this magic.

Any damage done to these trees is repaired at the rate of 10 points per round. This applies to the walls of the structure as well. In addition, the trees and structure have spell resistance 30 against spells that specifically affect wood (like *warp wood* and *repel wood*).

Ringing the circular platform is a carefully cultivated wall of razor-sharp thorns. Unlike the *wall of thorns* spell, this wall is only a foot thick and made from tough natural vegetation. It is infused with the magic of this site, but it is not itself magical and thus cannot be dispelled. The wall circles the platform's rim, so any creature climbing up from below must pass through the thorns. This inflicts only 1d3 points of damage, but anyone who takes damage from the thorns must also make a DC 18 Fortitude save to resist being poisoned. The thorn poison deals 2d6 Strength damage on a failed save (both initial and secondary). The wall itself is five feet high, and can be climbed with a DC 15 Climb check (with damage and possible poisoning being suffered each round of climbing).

Four wooden doors exit the central building, each door merging almost seamlessly with the surrounding wood. While none of the doors are currently locked, they can all be barred from the inside.

Aside from the doors, two platforms (flush with the rest of the wood) are just visible from the ground below the outpost. These platforms were raised or lowered by the elves via ropes, and are secured by stout iron bolts when not in use. Each platform weighs 150 lb. and takes up a 5-foot square.

- **Tree Trunks**: 10 ft. thick; Hardness 5; hp 1,200; Climb DC 15; Break DC 50.
- **Wooden Platform**: 5 ft. thick; Hardness 5; hp 600; break DC 40.
- **Wall of Poison Thorns**: 1 ft. thick; 5 ft. high; Hardness 5; hp 60; Climb DC 15; Break DC 25.
- **Wooden Building Walls**: 6 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 60; Climb DC 20; Break DC 30.
- **Wooden Doors**: 2 in. thick; Hardness 5; hp 20; Break DC 25.

Creatures: The diseased-looking tree near the Cradle itself is in fact Amarantha's bonded ironmaw tree. After attacking and killing the Cradle's defenders, the dryad used the *Greenbond Harp* to infuse herself with the site's power, transforming herself into a woodling in exchange for her half-fiend template. Since then, she's spent the last few days studying the *Harp* in hopes of finding a way to further expunge the fiendish taint from her body. Unfortunately for the PCs, Amarantha's infusion of nature has done nothing to soften her cruelty and hatred toward non-plants.

Amarantha is likely inside the Cradle when the PCs arrive in the region unless they are unusually loud in their approach. She depends on her ironmaw to inform her if intruders appear. If the ironmaw notices the PCs coming, it remains motionless, appearing to the untrained eye as a harmless but horribly diseased tree. It uses its bond with Amarantha to telepathically alert the dryad to the PCs' arrival as soon as it notices them. A successful DC 22 Knowledge

(nature) check immediately identifies the ironmaw for what it is, but otherwise, only magic (like *detect evil*) can reveal the danger the ironmaw presents before it attacks. When it does attack, four powerful tendrils unfurl from the plant's upper body, and a massive fanged maw opens in the side of its trunk.

If Amarantha is alerted to the PCs' approach, she takes a round to use her *wand of mage armor* on herself (this bonus is included in her stats). She then uses her *flee the scene* invocation to *dimension door* up on top of the wall of thorns that surrounds the platform. Note that she does not take damage from the thorns on the wall since her damage reduction is high enough to block it. She calls out to the PCs, asking their business in Hanali's Cradle, even if she cannot see or hear them herself. If the PCs attack, she responds as detailed in Tactics. If, instead, the PCs decide to talk, she introduces herself as Amarantha and claims to be the Cradle's guardian. A successful Sense Motive check opposed by her Bluff check allows a PC to note the deception.

If asked about the strange, diseased tree (her ironmaw), she claims it has been corrupted by the same evil energies that plague other parts of this forest, and that she is seeking a way to heal it. If a PC points out that the "tree" radiates evil, she nods mournfully and indicates that she knows this, but that it is but another manifestation of its supernatural disease.

If the PCs ask her why Evistar wasn't warned of the attack, she feigns surprise and horror, and claims that no such vile army of plant monsters passed within a mile of Hanali's Cradle. She offers teleportation magic as an explanation—"Perhaps the monsters used a portal from the corrupted section of woods to attack Evistar by surprise?"

Amarantha's goal is to get the PCs to leave without attacking or entering the Cradle's interior, since the bodies of its three guardians still lie within. She tries to get the PCs to turn their attention to the expanse of corrupted forest that once served as Turlath's domain. If it becomes obvious that the PCs aren't buying her story, she attacks as detailed below.

Although Amarantha was able to cleanse herself of the corruption caused by the half-fiend template that Turlath infused into her body, she still retains the warlock levels she gained as a result of this fiendish infusion. A warlock is a supernatural character whose sinister arcane powers are inborn abilities, not spells. A warlock's signature power is the ability to channel eldritch energies into a single blast of damaging power.

Amarantha, female woodling dryad warlock 10: CR 13; Medium fey; HD 14d6+42; hp 93; Init +10; Spd 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (good); AC 31, touch 17, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +9; Grp +9; Atk +16 melee (1d4+1 plus 5d6 plus blindness, +1 *elf bane dagger* with *hideous blast*) or +15 ranged (5d6, *eldritch blast* plus blindness); Full Atk +16/+11 melee (1d4+1, +1 *elf bane dagger*) and +11 melee (1d6, slam) or +15 ranged (5d6, *eldritch blast* plus blindness); SA eldritch blast, invocations, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 5/cold iron, damage reduction 5/slashing, deceive item, *detect magic*, fiendish resilience, ironmaw dependent, low-light vision, plant traits, resistance to acid 10 and fire 10, vulnerability to fire, wild empathy +19; AL CN; SV Fort +9, Ref +13, Will +12; Str 10, Dex 22, Con 16, Int 16, Wis 12, Cha 24; *Complete Arcane* (warlock) 5, *Monster Manual III* (woodling) 197.

Skills: Bluff +25, Diplomacy +15, Escape Artist +13, Handle Animal +14, Hide +13, Intimidate +15, Knowledge (arcana) +13, Knowledge (nature) +10, Knowledge (the planes) +13, Listen +8, Move Silently +13, Ride +8, Sense Motive +11, Spot +8, Survival +8, Use Magic Device +17.

Feats: Combat Expertise, Dodge, Great Fortitude, Improved Initiative, Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Abyssal, Common, Draconic, Elven, Sylvan.

Eldritch Blast (Sp): Amarantha's *eldritch blast* manifests as a 250-foot-long ray. It is a ranged touch attack that affects a single target, allowing no saving throw. Amarantha's *eldritch blast* deals 5d6 points of damage on a hit. This ability is the equivalent of a 5th-level spell, and is subject to spell resistance. An *eldritch blast* deals half damage to objects, but the damage bypasses all forms of damage reduction and all forms of energy resistance.

Invocations: Invocations are similar to spell-like abilities—they represent a warlock's repertoire of attacks, defenses, and abilities. A warlock can use any invocation he knows at will. They are considered spell-like abilities;

Amarantha's Invocations

If you don't have access to *Complete Arcane*, use the following notes when using Amarantha's invocations during play. She can use all of these invocations at will; activating an invocation is a standard action that provokes attacks of opportunity. The number that follows each invocation's name is its effective spell level. The effects of her invocations are included in her stat block as appropriate.

Beguiling Influence (2nd): Amarantha gains a +6 bonus on Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks for 24 hours.

Beshadowed Blast (4th): Anyone who takes damage from Amarantha's *eldritch blast* must make a DC 21 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1 round.

Eldritch Spear (2nd): This invocation increases the range of Amarantha's *eldritch blast* from 60 feet to 250 feet.

Fell Flight (3rd): Amarantha sprouts a streaming, winglike cape of shadows that grants her a fly speed equal to her land speed (good maneuverability) for 24 hours.

Flee the Scene (4th): Amarantha can use *dimension door* as a spell-like ability, although the range is only 50 feet. When she uses this image, she leaves behind a *major image* of herself in her place that lasts for 1 round. The image reacts appropriately to attacks as if she were concentrating on it.

Hideous Blow (1st): As a standard action, Amarantha can make a single melee attack. If she hits, the target is affected as if struck by her *eldritch blast*, in addition to any weapon damage she inflicts.

invoking one provokes attacks of opportunity and they can be disrupted. The save DC for an invocation is 10 + the equivalent spell level of the invocation + the warlock's Charisma modifier. Unlike other spell-like abilities, invocations are subject to arcane spell failure from medium or heavy armor.

Detect Magic (Sp): As a warlock, Amarantha can use *detect magic* as the spell at will. Caster level 10th.

Deceive Item (Ex): Amarantha can take 10 at all times with her Use Magic Device skill. She does not automatically fail at using this skill on a natural 1.

Fiendish Resilience (Su): Once per day, as a free action, Amarantha can enter a state that lasts for 2 minutes. While in this state, she gains fast healing 1.

Ironmaw Dependent (Su): Whereas most dryads are bound to a tree, Amarantha is bound to an ironmaw. She must remain within 300 yards of it at all times. If she exceeds this limit, she becomes ill and dies within 4d6 hours. This also happens if the ironmaw is destroyed. The fiendish ritual that bonded Amarantha to the Ironmaw also established an empathic link between them. This link functions in much the same way as the link between a wizard and her familiar.

Plant Traits: Immune to poison, magic sleep effects, paralysis, polymorph, stunning, mind affecting spells and abilities, and extra damage from critical hits.

Warlock Invocations Known (caster level 10): least—*beguiling influence, eldritch spear, hideous blow*; lesser—*beshadowed blast* (DC 21), *fell flight, flee the scene.*

Dryad Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): At will—*entangle* (DC 19), *speak with plants, tree shape*; 3/day—*charm person* (DC 19), *deep slumber* (DC 21), *tree stride*; 1/day—*suggestion* (DC 21). Caster level 6th. Includes +1 bonus to save DCs for proximity to Hanali's Cradle.

Woodling Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): 3/day—*speak with plants*; 1/day—*command plants* (DC 22), *entangle* (DC 19), *summon nature's ally II, summon nature's ally IV, summon nature's ally VI.* Caster level 14th. Includes +1 bonus to save DCs for proximity to Hanali's Cradle.

Possessions: +1 elf bane dagger, ring of protection +1, amulet of health +2, wand of mage armor (33 charges), *wand of displacement* (7 charges), *wand of cure moderate wounds* (17 charges).

Ironmaw: CR 13; Huge plant (extraplanar); HD 12d8+72; hp 126; Init –1; Spd 10 ft.; AC 25, touch 7, flat-footed 25; Base Atk +9; Grp +27; Atk +17 melee (2d6+10/19–20, tendril); Full Atk +17 melee (2d6+10/19–20, 4 tendrils) and +12 melee (1d8+5, bite); Face/Reach 15 ft./15 ft. (60 ft. with tendril); SA attach, engulf, illness, tendrils, wounding; SQ damage reduction 15/magic slashing, immune to cold and electricity, resistance to acid 10 and sonic 10, plant traits, spell resistance 30; AL NE; SV Fort +14, Ref +3, Will +5; Str 30, Dex 9, Con 23, Int 4, Wis 13, Cha 14. *Fiend Folio* 104.

Skills: Hide +6 (+21 in forested terrain), Listen +14, Spot +13.

Feats: Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (tendril), Power Attack.

Language: Abyssal.

Attach (Ex): If an ironmaw hits with a tendril attack, the tendril, in addition to dealing normal damage, attaches to the opponent's body. A tendril pulls a stuck opponent 10 feet closer in each subsequent round (no attack of opportunity) unless the opponent breaks free, which requires a DC 25 Escape Artist check or DC 26 Strength check. An ironmaw can draw in a creature within 15 feet of itself and bite with a +4 attack bonus in that round. An ironmaw can draw a creature into its space and attempt to engulf it as well.

A tendril can be severed by a single attack with a slashing weapon (made as an attempt to sunder a weapon) dealing at least 13 points of damage.

Engulf (Ex): As a standard action, an ironmaw can attempt to engulf a Large or smaller creature that enters its space. The victim of the attack can make an attack of opportunity, but if it does, it does not get a saving throw. A victim that does not make an attack of opportunity must make a DC 15 Reflex save or be engulfed; on a success, the victim is pushed back or aside (but is not freed from attached tendrils). An engulfed creature takes 2d6+10 points of bludgeoning damage and must hold its breath or begin to suffocate.

Illness (Ex): An ironmaw's tendrils can sap an opponent's health. Anyone caught by a tendril must succeed on a DC 22 Fortitude save or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage.

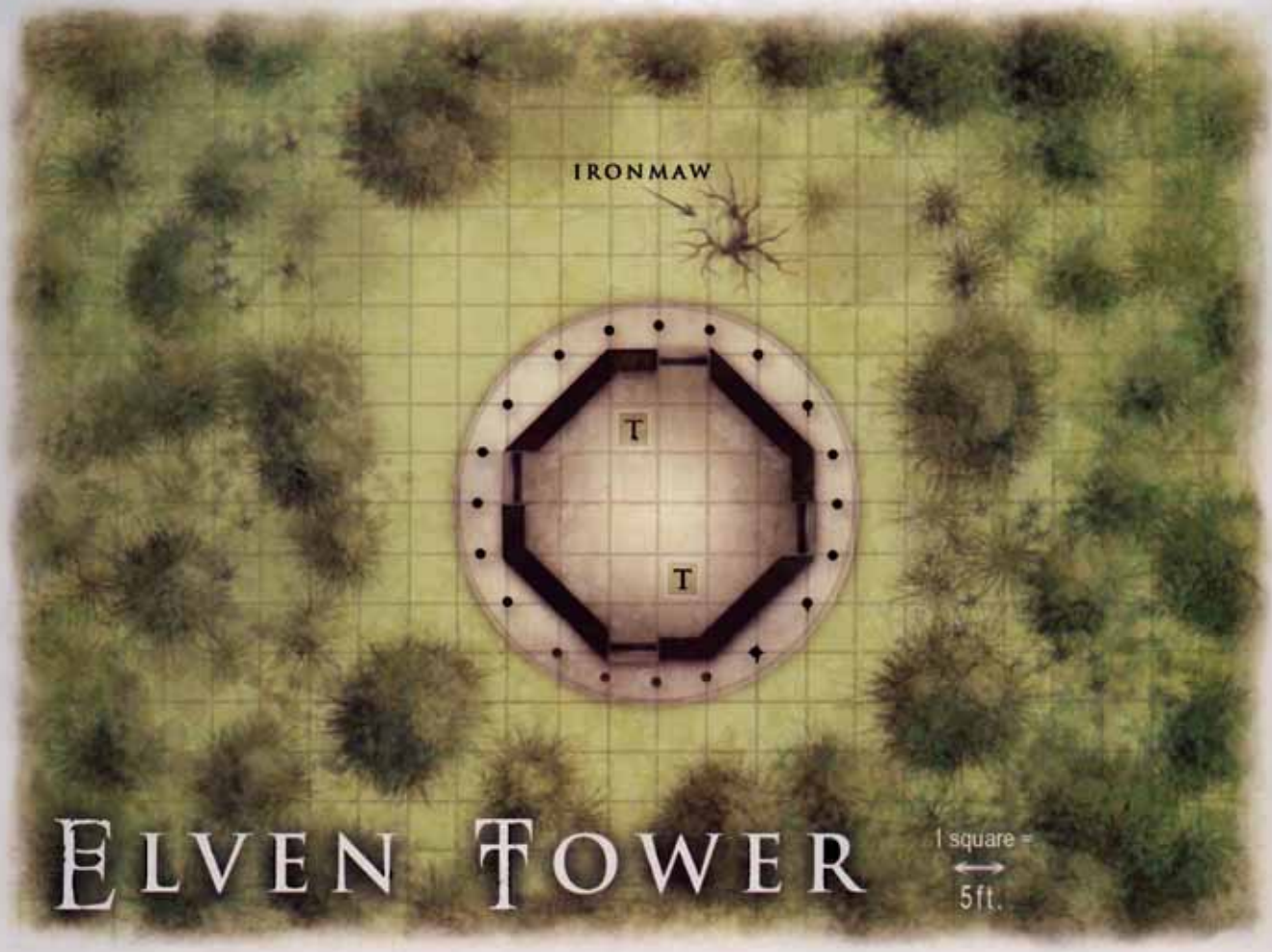
Tendrils (Ex): An ironmaw can attack with its four tendrils from up to 60 feet away. Anyone struck by a tendril takes damage, loses blood, may suffer illness, and risks being drawn toward the ironmaw's trunk.

Wounding (Ex): A wound resulting from an ironmaw's tendril attack bleeds for an additional 3 points of damage per round thereafter. Multiple wounds from such attacks result in cumulative bleeding loss (two wounds for 6 points of damage, and so on). The bleeding can be stopped only by a DC 10 Heal check or the application of any cure spell or other healing magic.

Tactics: If the PCs attack or attempt to enter the Cradle itself, Amarantha immediately attacks. If she's initiating an attack, she begins by using a *suggestion* to cause a spellcaster or archer to go take a nap under the "diseased tree." Once combat begins, she orders the ironmaw to attack anyone who tries to sleep near its roots. It also uses its tendrils to attack anyone who attempts to reach the Cradle platform.

Amarantha tries to maintain ranged superiority, using her *fell flight* and *flee the scene* invocations to do so. She uses her *eldritch blast* on spellcasters and characters armed with ranged weapons, alternating it with *summon nature's allies* and using *entangle* and *charm person* to immobilize strong fighters. If anyone reaches the platform, she opens the door and calls on the two sporebats within to come to her aid.

Although evil, Amarantha isn't suicidal. If things are looking grim (especially if her ironmaw is faring poorly), she *flees the scene* to her ironmaw and then



commands it to retreat. She uses her wands to protect and heal it as necessary. Once she flees into the woods, a successful Spot check opposed by their Hide checks is required to note their location.

Treasure: Amarantha has hidden the gear she stripped from the three guards under her ironmaw's roots for now. This stash includes three +1 *composite longbows* (+2 Str), three +1 *longswords*, three masterwork daggers, 34 arrows, 3 *plant slaying arrows*, three suits of +2 *studded leather*, 3 +1 *bucklers*, and a *wand of blight* (17 charges).

Inside the Outpost

The Cradle's interior consists of a single large octagonal room. Three sleeping mats lie against one wall. A raised dais sits in the middle of the room, upon which rests an ornate harp made of green and red wood. Heaped in a corner opposite the mats are the bodies of three elves, each stripped to their loincloths and covered with strange and deep charred puncture wounds.

The guardians of Hanali's Cradle once lived here, but now, their bodies lie heaped in the corner. The strange puncture wounds on their bodies are from Amarantha's *eldritch blast*. The large harp on the dias is the *Greenbond Harp* itself.

Creature: If the PCs manage to reach this area without alerting the ironmaw or the dryad, they find Amarantha within, studying the harp intently. She keeps two sporebats she's controlled with *command plants* in here at all times to guard the harp as well. The sporebats are loyal to the dryad, and attack anyone else they see enter this chamber.

Sporebats (2): hp 97; see page 47.

Treasure: The *Greenbond Harp* is a powerful artifact, although if brought out of Hanali's Cradle its powers are greatly diminished. There are no other items of value here, as Amarantha has looted the dead and hidden their gear under her ironmaw.

Concluding the Adventure

If the PCs kill Amarantha, the organized threat posed by the corrupted plants is curbed. If, on the other hand, Amarantha escapes, she soon replaces Turlath as the primary menace in the woods.

In any event, Kalarinth makes good on his promise to reward the PCs for their aid, even if he didn't mention it in Evistar. This reward comes in the form of a small ornate wooden coffer (itself worth 500 gp) that contains 10,000 gp in rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. In addition, he offers to grant the PCs continued access to the *Greenbond Harp*. If none of the PCs can activate its powers but they still wish to use the harp, Kalarinth can arrange to have an elven bard perform the necessary music for them.

Greenbond Harp (Major Artifact)

This large harp functions as a normal masterwork harp. It stands five feet in height and weighs 30 pounds. Once per day, a character with at least 1 rank in Perform (stringed instruments) can use the harp to cast one of the following spells: *break enchantment*, *heal*, or *commune with nature*.

The *Harp's* primary function is to channel the ambient natural magical energies that suffuse Hanali's Cradle. Activating this function requires a character with at least 13 ranks in Perform (stringed instruments). Alternately, a DC 33 Use Magic Device check can be used to activate this function. Channeling these energies requires eight hours of uninterrupted concentration. The target of the energies need not be the player, but must be within 30 feet of the harp and within the line of sight of its player. The target must be willing to accept the infusion of magic.

At the end of this 8-hour period, the target gains a permanent bond with the natural world, transforming into a plant-like creature known as a woodling. This template is detailed on pages 197–199 of the *Monster Manual III*. This template can only be applied to corporeal animals, dragons, fey, giants, humanoids, magical beasts, or monstrous humanoids. The transformation takes a fair portion of its target's life force and experience, replacing what it takes with the natural energies and magic that complete the transformation. Once a creature gains the woodling template, he must give up three character levels, replacing the benefits of those three levels with those granted by the woodling template. Since the woodling template has a +3 modifier to ECL, the character's actual ECL does not change.

Alternately, if a character already possesses a creature template that has an ECL adjustment of +3 or higher, he can abandon that template and replace it with the woodling template. If he replaces a template that has an ECL of higher than +3, his new ECL total is lower; "extra" ECL bonuses are lost in the trade. If by abandoning a template the creature becomes one of the creatures that the woodling template can be legally applied to, she may then gain the woodling template. A creature that would remain an aberration, construct, elemental, ooze, outsider, plant, undead, or vermin after abandoning a template cannot be transformed into a woodling in this manner. It was in this manner that Amarantha shed her half-fiend template, replacing it with the woodling template, although since the half-fiend template has a +4 ECL bonus, the trade wasn't completely efficient from a numbers viewpoint. Templates that do not have an ECL adjustment (such as the skeleton or zombie templates) cannot be abandoned to fuel this transformation.

If you don't have access to *Monster Manual III*, you can instead have the harp replace three of the target's character levels with druid or ranger levels.

CL 20th; 30 lb.

Phillip writes, "I have always wanted to design an adventure using a cool flowery name for the main villain, so I came up with the dryad Amarantha. In poetic terms the Amaranth is the flower that never fades, so here's hoping that Amarantha doesn't fade from your memory anytime soon. Well, at least make sure she kills plenty of PCs before she does!"

Scaling the Adventure

Although this adventure is designed for 13th-level PCs, it can be adjusted for PCs of higher level by using the following modifications. Remember that altering the difficulty of the encounters in the adventure changes the amount of treasure that PCs find.

14th- to 15th-level characters: Add two fiendish shambling mounds to the overland encounter and one sporebat to the aerial encounter. Increase Amarantha's warlock level by one or two, and advance the ironmaw's Hit Dice by 4 (for 14th-level) or by 5 and make it a Gargantuan creature (for 15th-level).

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QUICKSILVER HOURGLASS

BY ANSON CARALYA,
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BY ROBERT LAZZARETTI,
ANY SETTING, EPIC-LEVEL (21ST & UP), PLANAR DUNGEON CRAWL,

Epic characters have many weapons at their disposal, from the paladin's *+7 holy vorpal speed greatsword* to the wizard's quickened *meteor swarm*. These weapons can destroy the mightiest opponent, blast legions of fiends, and put down clouds of dragons, yet they are nothing compared to a weapon created in a long-lost age, a weapon so ruinous, so wicked, that gods sacrificed themselves to ensure it would never be used. Now that this weapon has been uncovered, can anyone prevent its cataclysmic awakening?

"Quicksilver Hourglass" is a D&D adventure designed for four 30th-level characters, although it can be adapted for player characters of higher or lower level as detailed in the "Scaling the Adventure" sidebar.

Adventure Background

Eons ago, a goddess named Vourzoun waged a divine war. When she realized her cause was doomed, she decided to destroy everything both she and her enemies held dear. The tool for this terrible doom was the Quicksilver Hourglass, a monstrous weapon fueled by divine life energy. Vourzoun ordered her lieutenant Erivatius (the embodiment of death and aging) to bind himself within the Quicksilver Hourglass to provide the weapon with a source of power. When the time was right, she needed simply to focus the Quicksilver Hourglass on the Material Plane and order Erivatius to sacrifice himself using a specially crafted key to unlock his own lifeforce. If the plan worked, all life on the Material Plane would age at a vastly accelerated rate. Vourzoun hoped to reduce the mortal world to dust and bones in a single apocalyptic night.

Yet the construction of such a potent weapon did not go completely unnoticed. As Vourzoun worked on the Quicksilver Hourglass, powers personifying law and equilibrium, the rulers of Mechanus, took notice. They did not object to the principle of her project—the exchange of a deity's divine essence for the lives of all mortal creatures on one plane was to them an acceptable balance. However, they were concerned that Vourzoun's plan could possibly allow Erivatius to survive his own sacrifice. They presented Vourzoun with an ultimatum. She must create a second key, one that would activate immediately upon the first key's use. If Erivatius was consumed in his sacrifice, the effects of this second key would be moot. But if he survived, the second key would bind him to the Quicksilver Hourglass, forcing him to await his judgment from the rulers of Mechanus. If she refused to build this second key, they promised to reveal the existence of the Quicksilver Hourglass to the deities of good. Vourzoun knew she could not resist the combined might of these inscrutable beings,

and accepted their proposition. She decided that the safest place for both keys would be within the Hourglass itself, as it is easier to defend one location than several.

Vourzoun's plan to purge the Material Plane of life would have succeeded, had not the fanatic followers of Erivatius discovered her plan for their patron's sacrifice. A terrible schism struck Erivatius' faith, and those who rebelled at the thought of their deity's sacrifice, in a desperate gambit, tipped off Vourzoun's enemies by telling them of the Quicksilver Hourglass. The gods of good feared that a direct assault on the Quicksilver Hourglass would only force Vourzoun's hand early—they decided they couldn't risk even a premature activation of the weapon. They had only one option open, and that option required a sacrifice of their own.

Rather than staging a direct assault on the Hourglass, Vourzoun's enemies called upon Faynsor, a good deity of time and knowledge. They spoke with him at length of the problem, and in the end Faynsor agreed to help them by forfeiting his own divine power to sequester the Hourglass in a self-contained dimensional void of non-time. With the Hourglass stolen from Vourzoun (along with her most powerful ally, Erivatius, who was already bound inside the Hourglass), the evil goddess scrambled to defend her realm. The resulting battle shook the foundations of reality, and when the dust cleared... none of this ancient pantheon survived.

Ages came and went, and the pantheon of Vourzoun and Faynsor was forgotten. The Quicksilver Hourglass might have remained unknown forevermore, had not one knowledgeable being survived the divine war. This creature was Aoorxiat, a phane abomination sired by Erivatius who survived the battle only due to his time duplicate ability. Over the eons to follow, Aoorxiat could sense the chronal energy stored in the Quicksilver Hourglass in his dreams and memories, and over the eons this torment drove him mad. The phane became insanely obsessed with releasing this energy from the Hourglass, if only to quiet the voices in his head. Yet he could not find the source—the Quicksilver Hourglass was too cleverly hidden. Aoorxiat spent entire ages searching the multiverse for it in growing anxiety and rage.

Aoorxiat was eventually discovered in the Far Realm during one of these despondent periods by a powerful vampire sorcerer. This was Baucojin, master of a cabal of horrifically powerful undead spellcasters called the Union of Eclipses. Baucojin quickly realized Aoorxiat's potential power as an ally. Although negotiation with a mad abomination was extremely difficult, Baucojin eventually secured Aoorxiat's allegiance in exchange for the development and use of epic spells to locate the Quicksilver Hourglass and release its energy. As Baucojin studied the problem, he came to realize something else. If he could indeed find this hidden dimension of non-time and release the Quicksilver Hourglass, he would be able to trigger the ancient weapon himself. Such a weapon would spell doom for the vampire's many living enemies, leaving him free to rule over all that remained of the Material Plane.

Recently, Baucojin completed his research and discovered the Quicksilver Hourglass' location. He, Aoorxiat, and several of his minions transported themselves into the Hourglass itself, and are now at work preparing to unleash the weapon on the mortals of the Material Plane.

Adventure Synopsis

"Quicksilver Hourglass" begins as a powerful wizard named Ojhalia notices a curious "ripple" in temporal energies throughout the Material Plane. With a bit of investigation, she learns of the Quicksilver Hourglass and Baucojin's plot, and asks the PCs to stop him. The party must defeat the guardians of the portal Baucojin created to reach the Hourglass, and then pass through the portal and overcome the defenders of the Hourglass: monks and a cleric of Erivatius, guardians and traps left by Vourzoun, and guardians from Mechanus—as well as Baucojin's raiding party. At the same time, they must explore the site to learn precisely what sort of menace it presents to the Material Plane, eventually discovering a ritual that might solve the problem. Two versions of this ritual exist, each requiring one of two powerful magic tablets; the keys Vourzoun was forced to create. One tablet grants Erivatius complete freedom and allows him to finally trigger the Hourglass, while the other constrains him in place, giving the PCs a chance to destroy him before he can trigger the Hourglass. Baucojin and his minions do not know of the second tablet, and halted their invasion after winning control of the first tablet, thinking their plans secure. Throughout this adventure, the PCs must contend with the fact that the Hourglass itself is slowly awakening. The longer they remain inside, the more rapidly they age—the PCs must defeat Baucojin and destroy Erivatius before they die of old age in a mere seven days.

Adventure Hooks

The PCs in this adventure are powerful characters. As such, word of their deeds has likely spread throughout the multiverse, so the ancient half-elf wizard Ojhalia has doubtless heard of them and knows of their power. This adventure assumes that Ojhalia contacts the PCs via *sending* spells and asks them to visit her immediately. She tells them that an ancient weapon is about to be unleashed on the Material Plane, and time is short if the PCs want to save their homeland. She provides a detailed description of her library, enough for a *greater teleport* spell to get the PCs there with ease. The exact location of Ojhalia's library is left vague, so you can place it in a location that makes sense for your campaign. Likewise, if another powerful wizard is already part of your game, feel free to substitute that wizard for Ojhalia.

Once the PCs have gathered their supplies and arrived at Ojhalia's library, proceed with Chapter One below.

CHAPTER ONE: SEVEN DAYS TO DEATH

Ojhalia is an ancient half-elf in green and gold robes. She wears her chestnut hair braided about a circlet, and her sharp emerald eyes always seem to be appraising those nearby. Ojhalia is one of the greatest authorities on temporal magic and the interaction between different dimensions along the borders between different planes of existence. She keeps a relatively low profile, but is nevertheless a powerful character. Her guardian is a silent, patient, and deadly solar named Andirell.

After a brief introduction, Ojhalia begins explaining. She's obviously flustered and nervous, and doesn't have time for interruptions. Read or paraphrase the following to the PCs at this time.

"The ages are punctuated by cataclysms that involve direct conflict among the gods. Perhaps in your travels you have heard tales of such armageddons? Certainly, countless such events have taken place in the past, and I guarantee more will take place in the future. Occaisionally, something from these deific wars survives, to be uncovered in a later age. A jeweled songbird appears and is used by a crusading bard to free the Kingdoms of Man. A simple mercenary captain rides a leaden destrier, draining the force of any spell cast in its presence, and conquers the greatest magocracy of his world. A fortress that causes all living things to age a year in a single minute is discovered by a genocidal sorcerer who uses it to murder the Material Plane. The first two tales are history. The third will come to pass in seven days, unless you can stop it."

At this point, Ojhalia's willing to entertain questions from the PCs. Likely questions (and her answers) are given below.

What is this fortress? How can it kill everything on the Material Plane? "Eons ago, a divine conflict pitted the forces of Tantrion, god of light and reason, against those of Vourzoun, goddess of magic and destruction. As defeat became certain to Vourzoun, she devised a scheme to ensure the victors would be punished—she forced her lieutenant Erivatius, god of time and aging, to sacrifice himself in order to fuel the Quicksilver Hourglass, a weapon built to cause rapid aging across the entire Material Plane. This horrific act of sacrifice, unusual among the forces of evil, was fortunately offset by a similar sacrifice by the forces of good. Just before Erivatius could finish his self-sacrifice, a deity of time named Faynsor surreptitiously sacrificed himself to hurl the Quicksilver Hourglass into a timevoid. In the ensuing battle, nothing survived, and the terrible threat of the Hourglass was forgotten. For a time."

What is a "timevoid?" "Until this morning, I'd thought of timevoids as little more than theory. Turns out, they exist. When two planes are coterminous, that is, when two planes share a boundary, pockets of time become trapped between them. These pockets are timevoids—self-contained demiplanes cut off from the rest of the multiverse. Indeed, cut off from time itself; a creature trapped in a timevoid would cease aging, but would also be unable to escape without the most powerful magic."

How did you learn about this? "A powerful sorcerer named Baucojin used an epic spell he created solely to detect such an anomalous region in the corners of the multiverse. Once he found it, he used another epic spell to create a portal from a cavern deep underground to the timevoid. When he and his allies passed through the portal, I noticed a strange fluctuation in the flow of time—essentially, time stopped for a fragment of an instant while the portal was open. I have always been sensitive to temporal magic, but even I almost didn't notice the ripples the portal caused."

Who is Baucojin? "He is a powerful vampire sorcerer, and the leader of a cabal of undead known as the Union of Eclipses. He's traveled the planes extensively. I can only speculate that he learned of the Quicksilver Hourglass on one of these sojourns."

Ojhalia

Why would Baucojin be interested in the Quicksilver Hourglass? "Baucojin has many enemies on the Material Plane. He once ruled a vast empire here, but was exiled to the outer planes centuries ago. He lusts for his old empire, but his enemies have maintained a watchful eye. I myself belong to one such society dedicated to keeping him from returning. Yet, if he could kill us all at once, there would be nothing preventing him from returning here to rule. And with the Quicksilver Hourglass, he has found a way to do just that. He intends to complete the Hourglass' original mission, to accelerate the aging process of everything that lives on the Material Plane.

In fact, I believe he has already begun; I can feel the portal to the timevoid pulsing and rippling in my mind even now. It's only a matter of time, seven days by my calculation, until he completes his task and unleashes a terrible doom upon the Material Plane and all who live within.

What can we do to stop him? You must travel through the portal he created and destroy Baucojin before he finishes his plan. At the same time, if you find a way to disarm the Quicksilver Hourglass itself, you'll be able to remove a terrible threat from the multiverse.

What kind of enemies might we face inside the timevoid? "Baucojin, of course. He has doubtless brought a strong force to prevent any interference in his plot. It is even likely that the last followers of Vourzoun and Erivatius are still there, holding the knowledge of their age. Also, be warned that the activation of the Quicksilver Hourglass has already wreaked havoc on the flow of time in the timevoid. Namely, the timevoid is rapidly 'catching up' on the last several thousand years of time it ignored. You'll doubtless age quite rapidly while you are there, adding further to the need to see a quick solution to the problem. Hopefully, one of my allies will be able to reverse this unnatural aging once you successfully return..."

Why can't you and your allies take care of this problem? "Baucojin timed his attack well. Most of my allies are engaged elsewhere in an entirely different conflict that requires all our attention. As for myself, I'm afraid that the same gifts that allow me to notice and observe the fluctuations in the flow of time make me horrifically susceptible to them. If I traveled to a timevoid, or if I even came close to a portal to such a realm, I suspect I would come to a rather unpleasant and violent end."

How can we destroy the Quicksilver Hourglass? "I'm not sure you can. You might just be able to research the weapon and come away with knowledge of where to look next. I certainly wouldn't recommend using any epic *dispelling* spells while you are there, as they could affect the Quicksilver Hourglass in unexpected ways. Normal *dispel magic* spells should have no effect on it."

THE UNION OF ECLIPSES

The characters might have heard of Baucojin and the Union of Eclipses, or they might resort to divination spells to learn more. Use the information here to fill in the blanks as needed.

The elven kingdoms of Verdoyer are located on a distant world on the Material Plane. For decades, these kingdoms have faced a vicious foe, a vampire known as Baucojin. This shadowy menace has led various cults and cabals in destructive schemes, always rising from the ashes of defeat to threaten a new catastrophe. Baucojin recently allied himself with an ancient evil from legend, the lich-lord Huersefful, who reappeared after centuries of absence—it is unknown whether Baucojin engineered Huersefful's return or was simply quick to profit from it. Shortly after this pairing became known, rumors spread that the two would bring to fruition one of the nation's most dire prophecies, "The Final Union of Eclipses."

Verdoyer's world contains three moons: the Crimson Blaze, a small flame-red moon associated with war; the Shrouded Orb, a large gray moon associated with death and ages best forgotten; and the Verdant Passage, a green moon representing Elysium. Great events are known to occur when all three moons eclipse the sun, and "The Final Union of Eclipses" states that the ultimate cataclysm will be the last of those events. When Baucojin claimed the title of "The Crimson Eclipse" and Huersefful "The Shrouded Eclipse," the scholars and priests of the elven kingdoms wondered what fell being would be revealed as the expected "Verdant Eclipse," knowing that the next triple-eclipse would not occur for another seven years. This identity was soon revealed, to the dread of all, as Ivirere. An elven queen and champion of her race, Baucojin and Huersefful had somehow transformed her into a vampire. She disappeared from sight after disposing of the other members of her court, and has been rumored to be the intelligence behind recent crippling strikes against the elves' civilization.

Baucojin actually cares nothing for the prophecy. He has merely been exploiting the elves' legend as a ruse to leave them thinking they have time that they do not. Although he did not directly revive Huersefful, he has been careful to aid the lich only enough to keep him as a useful ally for developing and executing his greatest scheme. Huersefful, for his part, trusts no one and nothing, and would usurp Baucojin's power at the first opportunity. Ivirere is an innocent victim, her mind, body, and soul twisted by Baucojin out of a need to satisfy his hatred for the elves who have frustrated his ambitions for centuries.

MAJOR VILLAINS

The villains in this adventure consist of two large factions and one small one. Key figures from these factions are grouped and listed below.

Followers of Baucojin

Baucojin: "The Crimson Eclipse," a human vampire sorcerer and the leader of the Union of Eclipses.

Huersefful: "The Shrouded Eclipse," an ancient human lich sorcerer, second in command of the Union of Eclipses.

Ivirere: "The Verdant Eclipse," an elven queen infected with vampirism by Baucojin, now a member of the Union of Eclipses.

Aoorxiat: A phane abomination spawned by Erivatius, now allied to Baucojin.

Followers of Erivatius

Hahsivatu: Male human monk and master of the greatest monastery of Erivatius (now contained within the Quicksilver Hourglass itself).

Iorian, Gurvitus, and Zerghezun: Male human monks who serve under Hahsivatu as loyal minions.

Beshejaer: Female half-fiend human cleric of Erivatius and the high priest of the greatest temple of Erivatius (now contained within the Quicksilver Hourglass).

Voursuol: Female half-fiend black dragon and spawn of Vourzoun, guardian of the Quicksilver Hourglass.

Erivatius: Evil demigod of a long-forgotten pantheon who has been imprisoned within the Quicksilver Hourglass.

Monitors of Mechanus

Maruts: Assigned to watch over Erivatius' prison and ensure that he is not unlawfully released.

What kind of reward are we talking here? "Well... if saving the Material Plane isn't reward enough, I assure you that my allies have very deep pockets and your... good work... won't go unrewarded if you desire gold and magic for satisfaction."

Once the PCs finish their questions, Ojhalia asks them to act with all haste. Her solar guardian volunteers a *wish* spell to transport the PCs to the Underdark cavern wherein the portal to the Quicksilver Hourglass is hidden. If asked, Ojhalia explains that there is no time to develop an epic spell to counter the effects of the Hourglass, and that such a spell would likely be beyond her capability (and that of the PCs as well).

The Timevoid Portal (EL 30)

The cold stone walls of this cavern glow with a sickly greenish-silver shimmer. The ceiling reaches heights of eighty feet, with a few small stalactites hanging down here and there. The floor is uneven, with a pool of stagnant-looking water in the east and a smaller pool in the north. The primary source of light in this chamber is the ten-foot-diameter vertical disc of swirling red and black energy that hovers just off the ground in the far corner of the cavern.

If the party arrives here by means of a *wish* cast by Ojhalia's solar guardian, they appear in the center of the large cavern.

To reduce the odds of unwanted intrusion, Baucojin and Huerseffful chose an extremely remote spot to forge the initial link between the Quicksilver Hourglass and the Material Plane. This cavern is located deep beneath a vast desert, in a section of the Underdark that has long been abandoned by intelligent life due to the overwhelming presence of poisonous rock known as sickstone. The passage to the west eventually reaches the inhospitable surface, while the passage to the south winds through a series of smaller caverns before coming to a dead end.

The walls, floor, and ceiling of this entire cave are solid sickstone, a type of glowing magical rock that sickens those who are struck by its festering illumination, which reaches to a distance of 40 feet; as a result, all of this cavern is bathed in the poison light. Any creature in the cavern must make a DC 15 Fortitude save each round or take 1d6 points of Constitution damage. A successful save reduces the Constitution damage to 1 point. Anyone in physical contact with the floor, walls, or ceiling of this chamber takes a –4 penalty on this saving throw, and any Constitution damage becomes Constitution drain instead. The damage caused by sickstone results from a magical disease, so creatures immune to magical diseases (like Huerseffful and his crawling head allies) are immune to these effects.

The portal that glows in this cavern was created by an epic spell Baucojin researched to establish a link between the timevoid and the Material Plane. The portal is permanent, but can be dispelled; it functions at caster level 29. If dispelled, the PCs will need to use a *wish* or *miracle* to reach the timevoid (and even these means have a flat 50% chance of outright failure). Dispelling the portal traps Baucojin and his minions in the timevoid for seven days. It does nothing to prevent the use of the Quicksilver Hourglass against the Material Plane.

Huerseffful has placed several *symbols of weakness* in this cavern; see Traps below for details.

Creatures: Huerseffful, the ancient lich-lord known as "the Shrouded Eclipse," guards the only entrance to the sequestered Hourglass. While his undead state matches his appellation, he actually prefers gaudy raiment, and is covered, almost swimming, in finery and jewels. Two crimson lights burn below his golden circlet. Long ago, he forged an alliance with seven crawling heads, and these seven undead menaces lurk at various points throughout this cavern, ready to come to its defense. A crawling head is a horrifying monstrosity spawned from a severed giant's head. Its mouth is huge and filled with shark teeth, and its neck ends in a writhing carpet of entrails, arteries, and veins that the creature uses to slither about. Numerous severed heads hang

in rotting pustules from the creature's cheeks and brow.

Huersefful, "The Shrouded Eclipse," male human lich sorcerer 22/archmage 5: CR 29; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 27d12; hp 175; Init +7; Spd 30 ft.; AC 47, touch 22, flat-footed 40; Base Atk +14; Grp +14; Atk +17 melee (1d8+3, +3 *wounding adamantine morningstar*) or +14 melee touch (1d8+5 plus paralysis, touch); Full Atk +17/+12 melee (1d8+3, +3 *wounding adamantine morningstar*) and +9 melee (1d8+5 plus paralysis, touch); SA archmage high arcana, fear aura (DC 35), paralyzing touch (DC 35), spells; SQ *contingency*, damage reduction 15/bludgeoning and magic, immune to cold, immune to electricity, immune to polymorph, immune to mind-affecting effects, summon familiar, turn resistance +4, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +14, Ref +20, Will +24; Str 10, Dex 25, Con —, Int 15, Wis 20, Cha 34.

Skills: Bluff +42, Concentration +30, Diplomacy +14, Hide +15, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana) +32, Knowledge (the planes) +18, Listen +15, Move Silently +15, Search +10, Sense Motive +15, Spellcraft +37, Spot +17.

Feats: Alertness (as long as Psodett is in arm's reach), Combat Casting, Craft Wondrous Item, Epic Spell Focus (necromancy), Epic Spellcasting, Greater Spell Focus (necromancy), Improved Combat Casting, Improved Spell Capacity, Skill Focus (spellcraft), Spell Focus (evocation, necromancy), Spell Penetration.

Languages: Abyssal, Common.

Sorcerer Spells Known (caster level 28; 6/9/9/9/9/7/8/6/7/7, epic 3/day, ranged touch +21): 0—*acid splash, daze* (DC 22), *detect magic, disrupt undead, flare* (DC 23), *message, ray of frost, read magic, touch of fatigue* (DC 25); 1st—*charm person* (DC 23), *expeditious retreat, magic missile, ray of enfeeblement, shield*; 2nd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 27), *ghoul touch* (DC 27), *Melf's acid arrow, mirror image, touch of idiocy*; 3rd—*dispel magic, lightning bolt* (DC 26), *protection from energy, vampiric touch*; 4th—*bestow curse* (DC 29), *dimension door, ice storm, shout* (DC 27); 5th—*cone of cold* (DC 28), *dominate person* (DC 27), *hold monster* (DC 27), *wall of force*; 6th—*contingency, greater dispel magic, true seeing*; 7th—*finger of death* (DC 32), *symbol of weakness* (DC 32), *greater teleport*; 8th—*horrid wilting* (DC 33), *moment of prescience, polymorph any object* (DC 30); 9th—*energy drain, imprisonment* (DC 31), *wish*; Epic—*epic mage armor, spell worm*.

Archmage High Arcana: Arcane fire, arcane reach (2), mastery of elements, spell power.

Contingency Effect: *Dimension door* triggers if Huersefful ever fails a grapple check.

Possessions: *+3 wounding adamantine morningstar, circlet of Charisma +6, cloak of resistance +4, gloves of Dexterity +6, periapt of Wisdom +6, ring of protection +5, greater ring of fire resistance, greater rod of maximize metamagic*, scroll of *Mordenkainen's disjunction*, pouch of spell components (holding powdered diamond and opal worth 15,000 gp for *symbol of weakness* and ointment worth 500 gp for *true seeing*), *contingency* statuette worth 1,500 gp.

Note: Huersefful has 21,000 XP to draw on for the casting of *wish* spells.

Psodett, Owl Familiar: hp 87; *Monster Manual* 277.

Crawling Heads (7): CR 20; Huge undead; HD 28d12; hp 182 each; Init +3; Spd 20 ft., climb 20 ft.; AC 12, touch 8, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +14; Grp +32; Atk +23 melee (2d6+10/19–20, bite); Full Atk +23 melee (2d6+10/19–20, bite) and +17 melee (1d8+5, 4 tentacles); Space/Reach 15 ft./10 ft.; SA cacophony, constrict 1d8+5, improved grab, spell-like abilities, vorpal bite; SQ absorb head, DR 20/magic piercing, immune to electricity and sonic, spell resistance 31, true seeing, undead traits, water vulnerability; AL CE; SV Fort +9, Ref +7, Will +20; Str 30, Dex 7, Con —, Int 20, Wis 19, Cha 25; *Fiend Folio* 35.

Skills: Climb +49, Concentration +38, Knowledge (arcana) +36, Knowledge (religion) +36, Search +36, Spellcraft +38, Spot +35, Use Magic Device +38.

Feats: Cleave, Combat Expertise, Great Cleave, Improved Critical (bite), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Trip, Power Attack, Spell Penetration, Weapon Focus (bite).

Cacophony (Su): As long a crawling head has at least 10 stored heads, it emits a horrific cacophony to a range of 60 feet. All creatures in range must make a DC 24 Will save each round or cower in fear. This is a sonic, mind-affecting effect.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the crawling head must hit with a tentacle attack. If it establishes a hold, it constricts for 1d8+5 damage.

Vorpal Bite (Ex): On a successful critical hit, a crawling head's bite severs the opponent's head, causing instant death.

Absorb Head (Su): As a free action, a crawling head can swallow the head of a Large or smaller creature it has severed with its vorpal bite. On the following round, that head becomes stored in the crawling head's body. Each of these crawling heads are currently storing 25 heads (they can each store a maximum of 28). Once per round, a crawling head can absorb one of these heads as a free action to quicken any of its spell-like abilities, to heal itself as if it had been targeted by a *harm* spell, or to grant itself a +6 enhancement bonus for one hour to one of its ability scores.

True Seeing (Su): A crawling head is under the constant effect of *true seeing*.

Water Vulnerability (Ex): Water inflicts 1d6 points of damage per round to a crawling head. In the case of total immersion, the crawling head takes 10d6 points of damage per round. An attack with water, such as from a hurled vial, counts as one round of exposure. The crawling heads avoid coming within five feet of the pools of water if they can help it.

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): At will—*animate dead, control undead* (DC 24), *death knell* (DC 19), *inflict serious wounds* (DC 21), *fear* (DC 21), *gentle repose, shield, speak with dead* (DC 20); 3/day—*create undead, create greater undead, finger of death* (DC 24), *wail of the banshee* (DC 26). Caster level 20th.

Tactics: Huerseffful begins each day by casting *moment of prescience* and *epic mage armor* on himself. When enemies appear, the lich orders three of the crawling heads to defend him while the other four slither in to attack the PCs. His first action is to target the most heavily-armored PC with *imprisonment* (using arcane reach to target anyone within 60 feet), followed by two maximized *horrid wiltings* over the next two rounds. He uses a maximized *energy drain* on any obvious wizard or sorcerer. He otherwise favors *cone of cold* and *ice storm* modified to inflict acid damage, *finger of death*, and arcane fire as long-range attacks. Against opponents within 60 feet, he uses arcane reach to cast *bestow curse* and *touch of idiocy* as ranged touch attacks. In a tight spot, he uses his *moment of prescience* bonus on a save or as a bonus to his AC. He always saves at least two 9th-level spell-slots so he can use *wish* to recover from emergencies.

The crawling heads use absorbed heads to cast quickened *wails of the banshee* each round, followed by quickened *fingers of death* and quickened *fear*. They save a couple absorbed heads to heal themselves as needed.

Huerseffful casts *greater teleport* to flee to his hidden lair if he is reduced below 75 hit points, while the crawling heads eagerly fight to the end. If the characters pass through the portal without first destroying all of the crawling heads, the remaining heads pursue the party through the portal (but Huerseffful does not.)

Traps: Huerseffful has cast multiple *symbols of weakness* on the floor of this cavern, as indicated on the map. All of the symbols are attuned to Huerseffful, Baucojin, Ivirere, and the crawling heads.

Symbol of Weakness: CR 8; spell; spell trigger; no reset; spell effect (*symbol of weakness*, 28th-level sorcerer, DC 32 Fort negates); multiple targets (all creatures within 60 feet); Search DC 32; Disable Device DC 32.

Development: If the characters find a way to interrogate Huerseffful and compel him to be truthful, he can tell them everything contained in "The Union of Eclipses" sidebar, but has little to convey of the Quicksilver Hourglass and Erivatius beyond what Ojhalia has already shared with them. He knows that the Hourglass causes accelerated aging, that it lies beyond the gate, and that in seven days there'll be a lot less life on the Material Plane.

CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE HOURGLASS

Once a character steps through the portal, he experiences a searing blast of pain as his body immediately begins aging at a horribly accelerated rate. This blast of pain forces a DC 20 Fortitude save, with failure indicating the character is stunned for 3d6 rounds.

Beyond the portal lies the timevoid. This realm is hazy and devoid of features but for a pair of insubstantial purplish tetrahedrons aligned along their central axis, roughly 200 feet along an edge. These tetrahedrons spin so rapidly in opposite directions that they almost appear conical. The

tetrahedrons touch at a single point, and a brilliant white light shines here, a fire lit by the strange friction.

The timevoid is a finite dimension, in the shape of a sphere 1,000 feet across, and is self-contained. Someone who passes through the timevoid's boundary immediately re-enters through the opposite side, moving toward the center of the demiplane. The timevoid itself has the following traits.

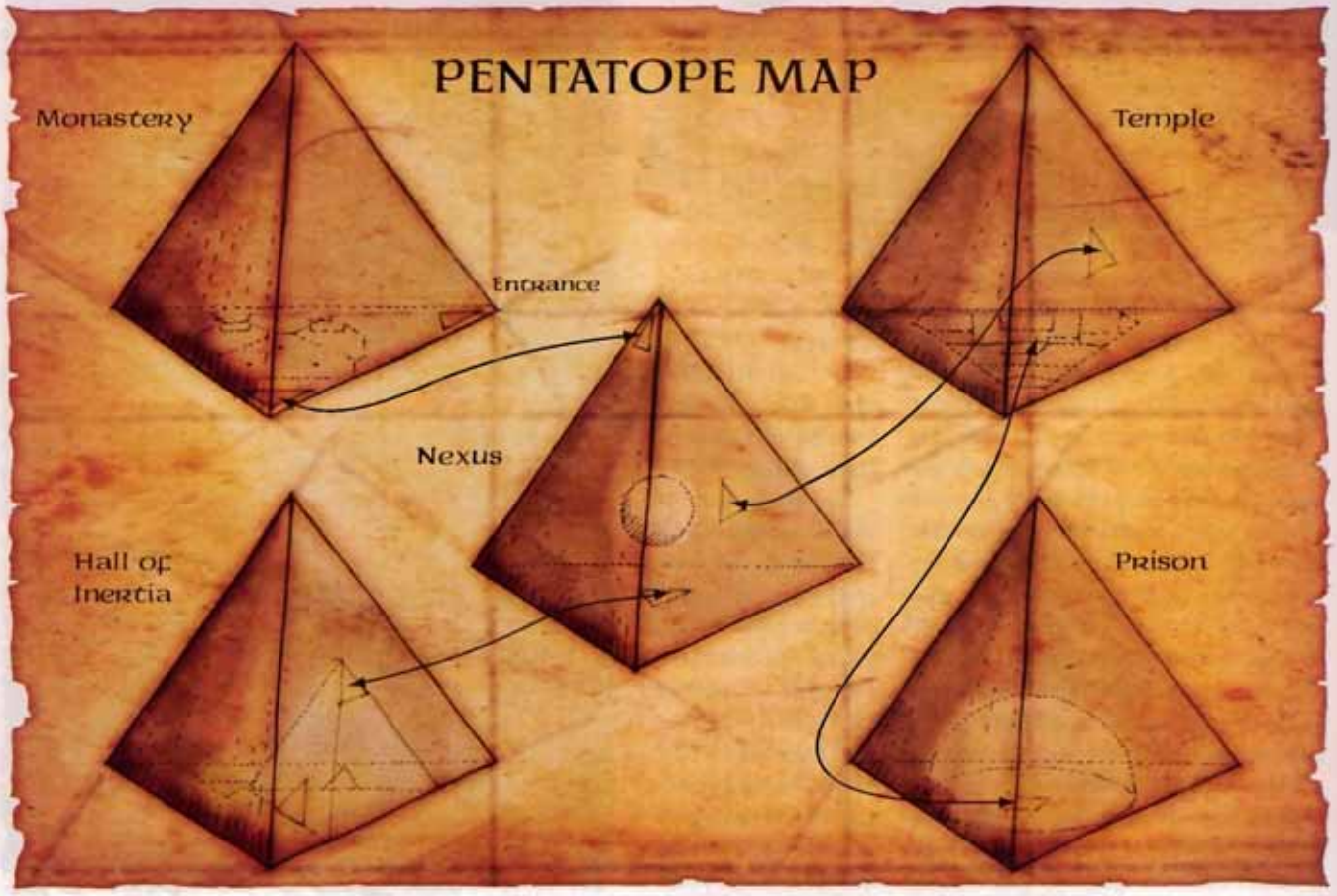
- No gravity.
- Accelerated Time. Although the timevoid was normally timeless, the recent activation of the Quicksilver Hourglass has altered this trait. It takes the Hourglass only seven days to siphon enough energy from Erivatius to fire upon the Material Plane. As the days of this week pass, the acceleration of time builds, increasing by a multiple of 3 each day. On the first day of this adventure, aging occurs at the rate of 3 years per day. On succeeding days, the accelerated time increases at the following rate.

	Years passing	
Day	**per day**	**per hour**
1	3	45 days
2	9	137 days
3	27	1 year
4	81	3 years
5	243	10 years
6	729	30 years
7	2187	90 years

The time acceleration is fueled by Erivatius' divine essence; each day that the acceleration continues, Erivatius loses one divine rank. The longer the PCs wait to assault the deity, the less powerful he grows but the more the PCs age.

If a character ages enough to advance into a new age category, he suffers the physical effects of aging (penalties to Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution) but not the benefits to mental ability scores. Constructs, elementals, outsiders, undead, and deities are immune to these effects, as is any being wearing the *Bindings of Erivatius*. The timeless body ability provides immunity to this aging effect. As long as someone is magically aging, they are also automatically fatigued. The Endurance feat prevents this fatigue, but rest does not remove it. At the end of day seven, Baucojin's epic spell shunts the Hourglass to the Material Plane, and every living thing on that plane experiences 100 years of aging per round.

- Mildly neutral-aligned.
- Limited magic. The timevoid remains isolated from the rest of the multiverse. Its separation from the Astral, Ethereal, and Shadow Planes causes the following spells to fail when cast anywhere within the demiplane: *astral projection, blink, dimension door, dimensional anchor, ethereal jaunt, etherealness, greater shadow conjuration, greater shadow evocation, greater teleport, Leomund's secret chest, project image, shades, shadow conjuration, shadow evocation, shadow walk, teleport,* and *teleportation circle*. *Wish* still works to transport characters to any point



within the timevoid or the Hourglass, but it cannot transport characters out of the timevoid. Spells of the summoning and calling subschools also fail, unless they summon or call something from within the timevoid itself. Likewise, any spells that involve travel into or out of the timevoid automatically fail (including *plane shift*, *dismissal*, *banishment*, and the like).

Features of the Quicksilver Hourglass

The spinning tetrahedrons that loom in the center of the timevoid are the physical manifestation of the Quicksilver Hourglass. They are completely insubstantial from the outside. Touching the point at which the tetrahedrons intersect is the only means of entry into the Quicksilver Hourglass. Fortunately for the PCs, this entrance cannot be closed or blocked. The Hourglass itself is a "pentatope," a four-dimensional expansion of a tetrahedron similar to how a tesseract is a four-dimensional expansion of a cube. The Hourglass consists of five tetrahedral chambers sharing common sides, with each side 180 feet long. Inside the hourglass, gravity works normally, save for in the Nexus Tetrahedron.

The interior walls of these five tetrahedrons are perfectly smooth and flat, and give off a glow equal to shadowy illumination except where noted. No mortal magic can affect or penetrate the walls. Normal materials within the Hourglass, such as the walls of the monastery and temple, have no special properties unless otherwise noted.

The only means of passage between the five tetrahedrons of the Hourglass is a series of portals. These portals typically appear as crackling sheets of yellow and gray energy in the shape of equilateral triangles 10 feet on a side. Any contact with a portal by a sentient creature causes instant, harmless transportation to the other side. The portals are completely unaffected by mortal magic. No spell effect can be cast through a portal from one chamber into another, although existing magical effects on a creature are not affected by passage through a portal.

The inhabitants investigate strange occurrences, and take counter-measures if subjected to hit-and-run tactics. Voursuol (the Nexus Tetrahedron), the maruts (the Prison Tetrahedron), the glooms, and the phane (area **H2**) never leave their locations, but all other creatures can be expected to launch coordinated counter-attacks against the characters, given the opportunity.

The Monastery Tetrahedron

This tetrahedron houses what was once the foremost monastery of Erivatius, plucked from the Material Plane to accompany him in his imprisonment. The two mithral statues were golems who once stood guard in the cavities to either side of the monastery doors, but were defeated by Baucojin's raiding party. The monastery's leaders fled during that battle, and now wait with the temple leaders in the Temple Tetrahedron.

The monastery itself is composed of magically reinforced superior masonry walls and flagstone floors with no special properties. Double doors within the monastery are 15 feet high, single doors are 7 feet high, and the ceilings are 20 feet high, except where rooms are open to the tetrahedron walls above.

M1. Entry Point

This chamber is a vast tetrahedral space, one hundred and fifty feet high, with smooth, yellowish walls that give off a sickly glow. A stark stone building fills most of the chamber's volume, crumbling where it touches the tetrahedron, unadorned beyond two large, human-shaped depressions in its walls. Two mangled mithral statues lie near the building's open, sundered doors.

Characters entering the Quicksilver Hourglass materialize at the point marked **M1** on the Monastery Tetrahedron map. This is the only point of exit from the Quicksilver Hourglass as well—any sentient being occupying this area for more than one round is transported out.

M2. Hall of Prowess (EL 28)

Corpses litter his large triangular chamber. Most are human, but two are larger and unidentifiable. Three stone pedestals, each five feet in diameter and five feet in height, stand in the room as well. Carvings on the walls depict various images of an ancient human with a stooped body and thick sheets of jagged metallic tears hanging from his empty eye sockets. This figure is pictured harvesting the old and infirm and presiding over funerals and open graves. The figure wears long thin scrolls covered with strange runes wrapped around each arm. The far wall shimmers and glows, a transparent curtain set with a single door. Beyond these shimmering walls looms only darkness.

This area was a training hall for the monks of Erivatius. The champions of these exercises took their places atop the pedestals according to a strict code, while the challengers would compete with each other unto exhaustion. The wall between this room and area **M5** is a permanent *wall of force* (caster level 30).

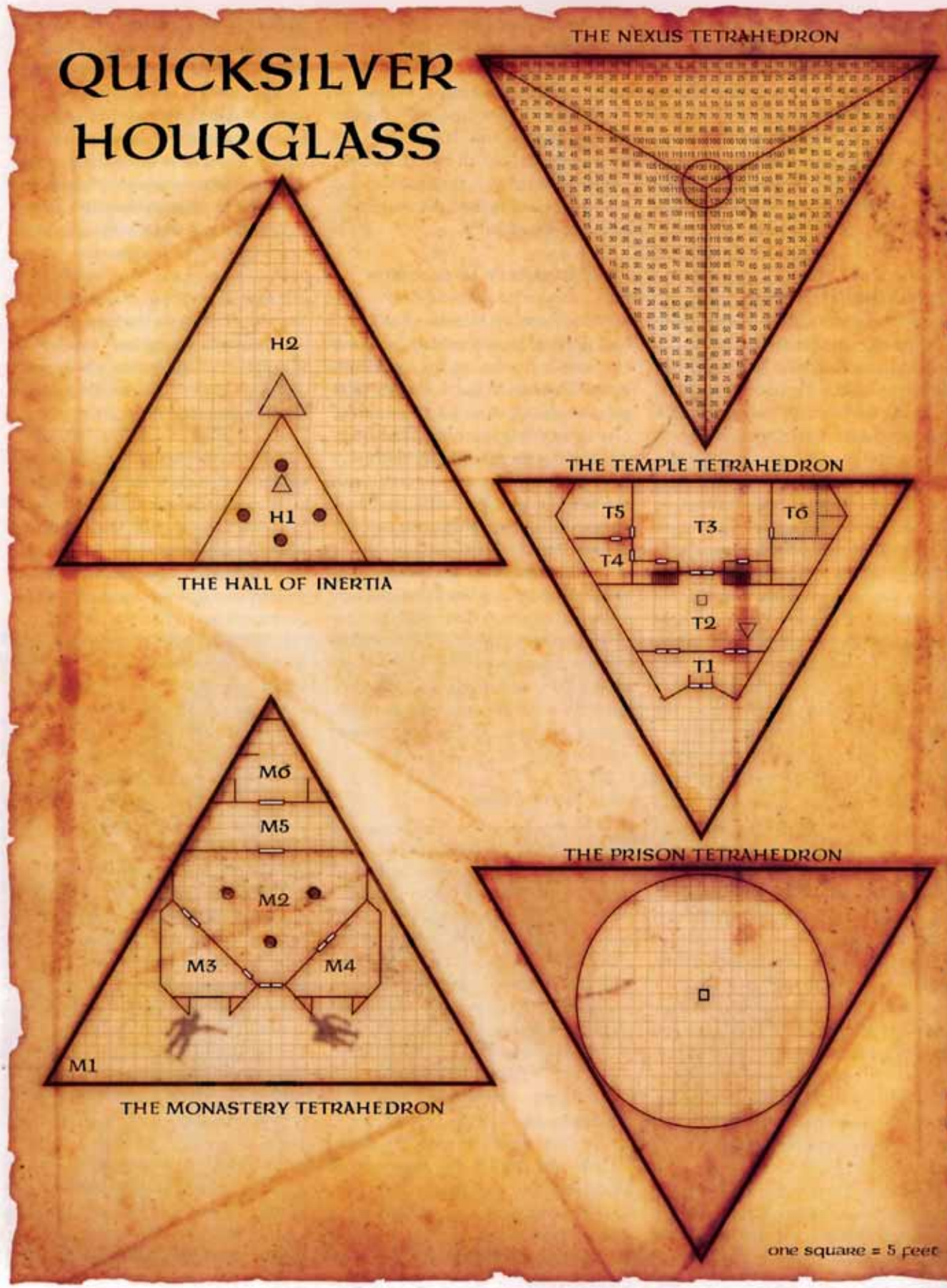
A DC 30 Knowledge (religion) check reveals that the place was dedicated to a lawful evil god of aging and death. If this check is exceeded by 10, the character also notes that the bindings on the deity's arms seem to have special importance—perhaps they were the god's symbol, or artifacts associated with his power.

Creatures: Some of Erivatius' favored servants were a race of cruel menaces known now as glooms. Three of these ancient assassins remain hidden in this chamber. While their bodies are unexceptional, covered in dull black, rubbery skin, their heads are devoid of eyes and feature exaggerated mouths, drawn back in fiendish grins. They wear fine black cloaks. The three in this space are survivors of the group that battled Baucojin. They are now under orders to prevent further intrusions into the Hourglass.

Glooms (3): hp 337 each; *Epic Level Handbook* 192.

Note: With the activation of the Hourglass, the glooms have suffered the effects of aging. Glooms live for thousands of years, and have nothing to fear about death from aging until day 7, at which

QUICKSILVER HOURGLASS



point they gladly die for their god. They do suffer from fatigue, and as a result take a –2 penalty to Strength and Dexterity, and cannot run or charge.

Tactics: The glooms hide among the pedestals in the room, waiting for an opportunity to attack. During combat, they use Spring Attack to pick off human opponents where possible, and their fear gaze as a ranged attack if they cannot melee an opponent. They retreat out of area **M2** if one is killed or immobilized, or if all are reduced to less than 50% of their original hit points. They then attempt hit-and-run attacks against the party. The glooms are bound to the monastery, and cannot pursue the PCs beyond this tetrahedron.

Development: The barbed devils in area **M5** observe combat here, hidden by the darkness in that area. They do not come to the aid of the glooms, as they would rather let them soften up the PCs and thus give the devils a chance to gauge their defenses. Once combat is over, the devils wait a few more rounds for short-duration spell effects to end, but if they see the PCs start to heal their wounds or otherwise recover, they attack as detailed in area **M5**.

M3. Barracks

Bunks, tables, and benches once furnished this room, although they are now in complete disarray. The stone walls are covered with intricate symbols.

This area served as barracks for the lesser monks of the monastery. Discipline among the ranks was rigid—only simple attire and unexceptional monk weapons can be found here, as personal items were not allowed. The symbols are a regimented series of meditative exercises—perhaps interesting to a fellow monk, but containing no real information.

M4. Detention Chamber

This chamber was clearly used to hold prisoners: thick iron bars form a series of cells, and heavy manacles bolted to the walls at a variety of heights indicate that creatures of all types could be held here. One corner of the chamber is open to the tetrahedron's shell.

Creatures of all types were incarcerated here over the ages to await their punishment. All cells are locked (Open Lock DC 30) and the cell bars are the equivalent of an iron portcullis, although there is nothing of value within them.

M5. Hall of Guidance (EL 29)

This chamber is filled with a permanent *deeper darkness* effect (caster level 30).

This long hall commands a view of the nearby chamber through a wall of transparent energy. Two large stone chairs stand here, and the far wall is covered in runes.

The overseers of the monastery orchestrated and observed combat exercises in the Hall of Prowess from their perches in this hall. The chairs are finely made but have no special properties. The runes on the walls are meditative markings similar to those that adorn the walls of area **M3**.

Creatures: Two powerful barbed devil blackguards sent from the Temple Tetrahedron now guard the monastery. Each devil sits in one of the chairs, using their ability to see in darkness to observe combat in area **M2**.

Advanced barbed devil blackguard 8 (2): CR 27; Large outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful); HD 26d8+234 plus 8d10+72; hp 467 each; Init +19; Spd 30 ft.; AC 43, touch 21, flat-footed 36; Base Atk +30; Grp +46; Atk +43 melee (4d8+12 plus fear, claw); Full Atk +43 melee (4d8+12 plus fear, 2 claws); Space/Reach 10 ft./10 ft.; SA fear (DC 30), improved grab, impale 4d8+18, poison use, smite good 2/day (+7 attack, +8 damage), sneak attack +2d6, spell-like abilities, spells, *summon baatezu*; SQ aura of despair, aura of evil, barbed defense (2d6+12 damage), command undead, damage reduction 10/good, dark blessing, darkvision 60 ft., *detect good*, fast healing 3, fiendish servant, immune to fire, immune to poison, resistance to acid 10 and cold 10, see in darkness, spell resistance 23, telepathy 100 ft.; AL LE; SV Fort +37, Ref +31, Will +26; Str 35, Dex 25, Con 29, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 25.

Skills: Concentration +38, Diplomacy +9, Hide +39, Intimidate +44, Knowledge (religion) +29, Listen +33, Move Silently +36, Sense Motive +31, Spot +33.

Feats: Alertness, Armor Skin, Blinding Speed, Cleave, Dire Charge, Fast Healing, Great Dexterity, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Weapon (claw), Improved Sunder, Power Attack, Superior Initiative.

Languages: Celestial, Draconic, Infernal.

Blackguard Spells Prepared (caster level 8): 1st—*cure light wounds* (3); 2nd—*bull's strength*, *eagle's splendor*; 3rd—*cure serious wounds*; 4th—*freedom of movement*.

Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 12th): At will—*greater teleport* (self plus 50 pounds of objects only), *hold person* (DC 19), *major image* (DC 20), *scorching ray* (ranged touch +36, 2 rays only). 1/day—*order's wrath* (DC 21), *unholy blight* (DC 21).

Possessions: +3 *moderate fortification mithril breastplate*, *amulet of mighty fists* +2, *ring of protection* +4.

Tactics: While the devils observe the battle in area **M2**, they cast *freedom of movement*, *bull's Strength*, and *eagle's splendor* on themselves. Once the PCs finish off the glooms and start to use healing magic or otherwise recover the combat, the devils teleport into the room to flank the most wounded-looking character. They then activate Blinding Speed and use sneak attacks to try to kill their victim.

The devils reluctantly fight to the death, knowing that the gloom in area **M6** won't allow them to retreat.

M6. Master's Quarters (EL 30)

The stone walls within this once-fine chamber are bashed in, its furniture smashed to pieces, and the grisly remains of creatures are spread throughout. The tetrahedron shell also forces its way into the space, narrowing down to a single point at the chamber's far end. Near this far end, a triangular patch on one of the tetrahedron's walls shimmers with a notably different appearance, composed of crackling sheets of yellow and gray energy.

This area contained several fine, if ascetic, living quarters for the monastery's leaders, but Baucojin's minions tore it apart in their assault. Treat the room as difficult terrain due to the rubble. The triangular patch is a portal that leads to the Nexus Tetrahedron.

Creatures: The glooms that dwelt in this monastery were led by one of their own, a horrifically skilled killer named Shoolian. When Baucojin invaded the Quicksilver Hourglass, he and his minions managed to kill Shoolian, but the clerics of Erivatius restored him using *true resurrection* and returned him to his post here, where he continues to guard against the further intrusion into the Hourglass. Shoolian is an invisible blade, a deft killer who specializes in fighting with daggers. The invisible blade prestige class originally appeared in *Complete Warrior*.

Shoolian, male gloom invisible blade 5: CR 30; Medium monstrous humanoid; HD 25d8+250 plus 5d6+50; hp 430; Init +23; Spd 30 ft.; AC 54, touch 49, flat-footed 26; Base Atk +28; Grp +42; Atk +62 melee (1d4+24/17–20, +10 *keen human dread dagger*); Full Atk +62/+57/+52/+47 melee (1d4+24/15–20, +10 *keen human dread dagger*); SA bleeding wound, fear gaze (DC 32), sneak attack +13d6 (+16d6 with daggers), spell-like abilities; SQ blindsight 60 ft., feint mastery, opportunist, quiescence, uncanny feint, unfettered defense; AL LE; SV Fort +19, Ref +49, Will +34; Str 38, Dex 56, Con 31, Int 24, Wis 26, Cha 30; *Epic Level Handbook* 192.

Skills: Balance +25, Bluff +43, Diplomacy +12, Hide +56, Intimidate +40, Jump +49, Listen +41, Move Silently +56, Sense Motive +42, Spot +41, Tumble +56.

Feats: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Endurance, Far Shot, Mobility, Point Blank Shot, Sneak Attack of Opportunity, Spring Attack, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (dagger).

Languages: Common, Draconic, Giant, Ignan, Infernal, Sylvan, Terran, Undercommon.

Bleeding Wound (Ex): By sacrificing 1d6 points of damage from a successful sneak attack, Shoolian can create a bleeding wound that continues to damage the victim for 1 point of damage per round. Multiple wounds result in cumulative bleeding loss. The bleeding can be stopped with a DC 15 Heal check or the application of magical healing. Creatures immune to sneak attack damage are immune to this ability.

Unfettered Defense (Ex): Shoolian adds a +5 bonus to his Armor Class as long as he wields a dagger and does not wear armor.

Uncanny Feint (Ex): Shoolian may feint in combat as a free action when armed with a dagger.

Feint Mastery (Ex): Shoolian can always take 10 on all Bluff checks made to feint in combat.

Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 20th): At will—*shadow walk*. 3/day—*true strike*.

Possessions: +10 *keen human dread dagger* (+5 *keen dagger* in the hands of any non-gloom), *gloves of Dexterity +6*, *bracers of armor +4*, *ring of evasion*, *ring of freedom of movement*.

Tactics: If Shoolian hears the characters' approach, he hides and prepares to lunge out to attack as soon as anyone approaches the portal. In combat, he fights with Combat Reflexes and prefers to surround himself with enemies so he can maximize his attacks of opportunity. He uses feint in combat as a free action to make all his attacks sneak attacks, if possible. He fights to the death, but like the other glooms he is bound to the monastery and cannot pursue enemies to other tetrahedrons or outside of the Hourglass.

The Nexus Tetrahedron (EL 31)

The walls of this tetrahedron-shaped chamber are composed of slowly undulating bands of vermillion and black, shot through with spasms of fiery orange. Three crackling pyramids of energy flicker at different points in the chamber, and a wretched-looking sphere of crushed bodies, twenty feet in diameter, careens madly through the room, smashing off the walls with tremendous force.

Gravity is unstable in this chamber. Down is always toward the center of one of the tetrahedron's sides. Further complicating matters, this gravitational focus seems to change randomly once every round, switching from face to face. When this change occurs, a ball of crushed corpses and body parts from devils, truly horrid umber hulks, and miscellaneous humanoid corpses tumbles off toward the new focus of gravity.

When the PCs enter this room, roll 1d4. The result indicates which tetrahedron face is "down" on that round. Creatures entering the tetrahedron without the ability to fly find themselves falling or sliding toward the center point of one of these walls. The map of the Nexus Tetrahedron indicates the distances in each square to the "ceiling." in order to aid falling damage calculations.

Creatures who can fly and have at least a good maneuverability rating can navigate this room by spending a move action each round to reorient themselves. Creatures who have worse maneuverability must spend a standard action to reorient themselves. A creature that does not reorient during a round loses control of his flight and is considered to be falling. Creatures that can hover may do so as a free action, avoiding the need to spend a move or standard action to reorient themselves if they do not actually move.

In addition, the sphere of corpses continues to slam through the room on an eternally destructive warpath. Each round, one randomly determined primary target (selected from the PCs and any other creatures with the exception of Voursuol) and all secondary targets (any non-Voursuol creatures or objects within a 10-foot radius of the primary target) may be struck by its path. The sphere makes an initial +40 melee attack against the primary target. If it misses, the sphere misses all the targets. If it hits the primary target, in inflicts 20d6 points of damage, and makes a +30 melee attack against all secondary targets. Each secondary target it hits also takes 20d6 points of damage. A Medium or smaller creature struck by the sphere must make a DC 30 Fortitude save or become stuck to the sphere. Each succeeding round, that creature must

make a DC 25 Reflex save to avoid taking an additional 20d6 points of damage as the sphere slams into the tetrahedron's walls. A stuck creature can escape with a successful DC 30 Strength or Escape Artist check, made as a standard action.

Although made of multiple corpses and body parts, treat the sphere as a single object if the PCs try to destroy it. The sphere is technically a magic item, although it has no real function other than to "collect" lose debris that build up in this chamber and to crush the life out of intruders.

Sphere of Ruined Bodies: AC 6; hp 300; SQ immune to bludgeoning damage, spell resistance 36; SV Fort +12, Ref +12, Will +12; CL 30.

Creature: True to her paranoid nature, Vourzoun did not trust the defense of her plan for vengeance to the servants of Erivatius alone. She also commanded her offspring Voursuol, a half-fiend black dragon, to limit movement within the Quicksilver Hourglass' central nexus. Although Baucojin and his minions fought their way past this chamber, they did so at great cost, and he is unwilling to face Voursuol a second time.

Voursuol is a truly ancient being with divine blood in her veins. Her ancestry shows in her elaborately curved horns, bat-like wings, smoldering scarlet eyes, and bulk. She is significantly larger than the oldest of great wyrms.

Voursuol begins each day by casting *epic mage armor* on herself (included in her statistics). She has served as this chamber's guardian since the Hourglass was created, and in those countless ages has realized that the shifting gravity in this room is not random, but is in fact a horribly complicated pattern. She has memorized this pattern, and the centuries of practice have given her the ability to fly about the room unhindered by the shifting gravity. By extension, she also knows the sphere of ruined bodies' pattern, and is never in danger of being hit by its relentless motion.

Voursuol, female advanced half-fiend great wyrm black dragon: CR 31; Colossal outsider (native, water); HD 43d12+559; hp 838; Init +7; Spd 60 ft., fly 250 ft. (clumsy), swim 60 ft.; AC 61, touch 9, flat-footed 58; Base Atk +43; Grp +79; Atk +64 melee (6d8+25, bite); Full Atk +64 melee (6d8+25, bite) and +62 melee (4d6 +15, 2 claws) and +62 melee (2d8+15, 2 wings) and +62 melee (4d6+35, tail slap); Space/Reach 30 ft./20 ft. (30 ft. with bite); SA breath weapon (DC 46, 28d4 acid, 140-ft. line), crush 4d8+34, frightful presence (DC 40, 420-ft. radius), smite good 1/day (+20 damage), spell-like abilities, spells, tail sweep 2d8+34; SQ blindsense 60 ft., damage reduction 15/epic, darkvision 120 ft., immune to acid, paralysis, poison, and sleep, keen senses, outsider traits, resistance to cold 10, electricity 10, and fire 30, spell resistance 35, water breathing; AL NE; SV Fort +36, Ref +28, Will +29; Str 50, Dex 16, Con 36, Int 26, Wis 23, Cha 28; *Epic Level Handbook* 179.

Skills: Concentration +59, Diplomacy +57, Escape Artist +49, Hide +33, Intimidate +57, Knowledge (arcana) +54, Knowledge (history) +54, Knowledge (religion) +54, Knowledge (the planes) +54, Listen +52, Move

NEW EPIC SPELL

Vourzoun's Multiplicity of Visage

Transmutation
Spellcraft DC: 79
Components: V, S
Casting Time: 1 free action
Range: 300 ft.
Target: One creature
Duration: 20 rounds
Saving Throw: None
Spell Resistance: No
To Develop: 711,000 gp; 14 days; 28,440 XP. Seed: *transform* (grow additional heads DC 21, additional breath weapon +10 DC, other bonuses and defenses +10 DC); Factor: 1 standard action casting time (+20 DC), quickened spell (+28 DC), reduced duration from permanent to 20 rounds (–10 DC).

This epic spell grants the caster two additional heads for the duration of the spell, provided the caster's size is Large or greater (casters of smaller size are limited to one additional head). Each additional head is able to make use of any breath weapons possessed by the caster. All breath weapons activate on the same round but can aim in different directions. The caster also gains the following benefits:

- An attack with each additional head for any bite, gore, or tongue attack normally possessed
- +2 bonus to natural armor
- Darkvision to 90 feet
- Decapitation attacks must affect all heads to be effective
- +4 bonus on Fortitude saves
- +4 bonus on Concentrate, Listen, Search and Spot checks

Silently +50, Search +54, Sense Motive +52, Spellcraft +69, Spot +52, Swim +74.

Feats: Ability Focus (breath weapon), Combat Reflexes, Epic Skill Focus (spellcraft), Epic Spellcasting, Eschew Materials, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (bite), Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack, Power Attack, Skill Focus (spellcraft), Snatch, Wingover.

Languages: Abyssal, Aquan, Auran, Draconic, Elven, Giant, Infernal, Terran, Undercommon.

Sorcerer Spells Known (caster level 19th; 6/9/8/8/8/8/7/7/7/5, epic 4/day): 0—*arcane mark, detect magic, detect poison, light, mage hand, message, open/close, prestidigitation, read magic*; 1st—*alarm, identify, obscuring mist, protection from good, unseen servant*; 2nd—*bear's endurance, bull's Strength, eagle's splendor, mirror image, see invisibility*; 3rd—*displacement, haste, protection from energy, tongues*; 4th—*charm monster* (DC 23), *dimension door, greater invisibility, polymorph*; 5th—*fabricate, feeblemind* (DC 24), *symbol of pain* (DC 24), *telekinesis* (DC 24); 6th—*greater dispel magic, greater heroism, true seeing*; 7th—*greater scrying, greater teleport, prismatic spray* (DC 25); 8th—*Bigby's clenched fist, discern location, mind blank*; 9th—*Mordenkainen's disjunction* (DC 28), *wish*; Epic—*epic mage armor, greater ruin* (DC 29), *Vourzoun's multiplicity of visage*.

Note: Voursuol has 25,000 XP to call upon for *wish* and *greater ruin* spells.

Dragon Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 19): 3/day—*charm reptiles* (DC 20), *darkness* (90 ft. radius), *insect plague*; 1/day—*corrupt water, plant growth*.

Half-Fiend Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 43): 1/day—*darkness, poison* (DC 23), *unholy aura* (DC 27); 1/day—*blasphemy* (DC 26), *contagion* (DC 22), *desecrate, destruction* (DC 26), *horrid wilting* (DC 27), *summon monster IX* (fiends only, does not function in timevoid), *unhallow, unholy blight* (DC 23).

Possessions: *Amulet of mighty fists +5, greater ring of fire resistance, ring of freedom of movement.*

Tactics: Voursuol's first act in combat is to cast *Vourzoun's multiplicity of visage* to gain two additional heads. She then uses her breath weapons on the party. She targets spellcasters with her Snatch ability, carrying them away from their protectors to drop them in the path of the sphere of ruined bodies. In melee, she uses Power Attack in steps of 10 points until she starts to miss targets. Voursuol generally uses her spells to bolster her abilities, casting *greater heroism* and *greater invisibility* if given the opportunity, but she can also unleash potent firepower with them if for some reason she is unable to use her natural attacks or breath weapon. She ignores non-spellcasters who cannot fly until they are the only opponents remaining, at which point they are treated to repeated blasts of acid breath, or bite attacks from the edge of her reach if they prove immune to the acid. She uses *wish* to heal herself if brought below 300 hit points.

Although Voursuol's flight ability and feats allow her to effectively roam the tetrahedron, she is so large that she cannot enter the corners: she may only fly into spaces with a height of at least 30 feet, and use her reach from there.

Development: If the characters interrogate her, Voursuol knows much about Vourzoun and her dogma, but little about Erivatius beyond his imprisonment in the Hourglass and the existence of two different rituals to release him. While she doesn't know the details of the rituals, she knows that the second ritual was created to appease the rulers of Mechanus.

Voursuol cast *wish* on herself several days ago to avoid the effects of the time acceleration, since it does not increase her draconic age categories.

If Voursuol is killed, other creatures in the Hourglass (such as surviving devils from the monastery or the uvuudaum in area **H1**) are free to explore other parts of the Hourglass as well.

The Hall of Inertia

Characters enter this tetrahedron at the apex. Without the ability to fly or otherwise slow their fall, they fall to the floor 60 feet below and take 6d6 falling damage.

H1. Ritual Chamber (EL 30)

This shadowy chamber has the now-familiar tetrahedral shape, but is only one-third the size of previous chambers and is mostly empty. Crackling portals are centered in two walls and four stone pedestals are visible through the gloom.

Although the interior walls of this chamber appear identical to the Hourglass walls, they are only equal to a *wall of force*, and may be destroyed or bypassed with *disintegrate* spells or similar effects. The portals located in the interior walls are identical to portals found elsewhere in the Hourglass, except that they only transport creatures to area **H2**. Activity in area **H1** is not detectable from area **H2**, and vice versa, unless the interior walls are breached.

Even within the Quicksilver Hourglass, contact with Erivatius followed a strictly controlled procedure. This chamber hosted meditation and ritualistic competitions in preparation for audiences with the deity in area **H2**. The pedestals resemble those in area **M1**, and served a similar purpose in combat between monks and other worshipers.

Creatures: The ritual chamber is guarded by Baucojin's vampiric consort Ivirere and her uvuudaum ally. Ivirere wears the attire of an elven queen on a hunt, and carries herself as royalty. She is still beautiful to behold, athletic yet delicate, but a horrible depravity radiates from her. The presence of the phane in area **H2** disturbs her, despite her undead state, so she has taken up a defensive position here rather than stand with Baucojin in area **H2**. The uvuudaum is madness manifested, a thought from the Far Realms made real. Its lower body consists of six spider-like arms splayed out beneath it, while a thick tail with a spike at its terminus has been substituted for a head.

Ivirere, "The Verdant Eclipse," female elf vampire fighter 12/duelist 15: CR 29; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 27d12; hp 175; Init +31; Spd 30 ft.; AC 54, touch 36, flat-footed 34; Base Atk +24; Grp +29; Atk +44 melee (1d6+14 plus 1 Constitution/15–20, *+5 adamantine wounding speed rapier*); Full Atk +44/+44/+39/+34/+29 melee (1d6+14 plus 1 Constitution/15–20, *+5 adamantine wounding speed rapier*) or +29 melee (1d6+5, slam); SA blood drain, create spawn, dominate (DC 25), energy drain, precise strike +3d6; SQ acrobatic charge, alternate form, canny defense, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, elaborate parry, enhanced mobility, fast healing 5, gaseous form, grace, improved reaction +6, resistance to cold 10, resistance to electricity 10, spider climb, turn resistance +4, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +11, Ref +32, Will +15; Str 21, Dex 36, Con —, Int 24, Wis 15, Cha 14.

Skills: Balance +45, Bluff +10, Climb +20, Intimidate +17, Hide +21, Jump +37, Listen +34, Move Silently +21, Perform (dance) +26, Search +15, Sense Motive +10, Spot +34, Tumble +56.

Feats: Alertness[B], Dire Charge, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Deflect Arrows[B], Dodge[B], Epic Toughness, Great Fortitude, Greater Weapon Focus (rapier)[B], Greater Weapon Specialization (rapier)[B], Improved Critical (rapier), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Trip, Lightning Reflexes[B], Mobility[B], Quick Draw, Superior Initiative, Weapon Finesse[B], Weapon Focus (rapier)[B], Weapon Specialization (rapier)[B], Whirlwind Attack.

Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven, Halfling, Gnome, Sylvan.

Possessions: *+5 adamantine wounding speed rapier, bracers of armor +7, amulet of natural armor +5, dusty rose ioun stone, gloves of Dexterity +6, headband of intellect +6, ring of protection +5, winged boots.*

Uvuudaum: hp 817; *Epic Level Handbook* 224.

Tactics: Ivirere activates her *winged boots* and then seeks heavily armored melee opponents to engage, harrying them using Spring Attack and leaving the uvuudaum to occupy spellcasters. In a tough situation, the uvuudaum uses *time stop* to gain the opportunity to activate as many of its combat-improvement abilities (*displacement, haste, stoneskin, true strike*) as possible. If the uvuudaum is killed or Ivirere is reduced to fewer than 70 hit points, she flees to area **H2** to alert Baucojin. The uvuudaum fights to the death without hesitation, using its *wall of force* ability to avoid being surrounded. It has a *contingent resurrection* in effect, and if killed by the characters, it resurrects one minute later to continue the fight.

Note that the uvuudaum's *nailed to the sky* does not function in the Quicksilver Hourglass demiplane, as there is no connection to other planes to allow for instantaneous transportation.

Development: If the characters have departed area **H1** when the uvuudaum's *contingent resurrection* takes effect, it looks for them in area **H2**, joining any melee underway there.

Ivirere, properly interrogated, can reveal much about Baucojin, the Union of Eclipses, and the phane, but she knows of only one ritual to free Erivatius. From what Baucojin has told her, a required component of this ritual is safe in area **H2**.

A *wish* or similar magic is necessary to restore Ivirere's life and mind and bring her alignment back to chaotic good. If the characters do this, Ivirere volunteers to join them, and if she survives the adventure, the characters gain a very powerful ally.

H2. Hall of Inertia (EL 31)

This large tetrahedral chamber has a smaller tetrahedron cut from it, of roughly the same size as the previous chamber. In the center of the space is a raised triangular stone dais. A series of huge abstract hands reaches up from the floor.

This space briefly served as Erivatius' audience chamber, and was tailored to his portfolio. The hands are stone and have no special properties, but may be used as cover. Close examination reveals minute runes covering the hands, and a DC 25 Knowledge (religion) check reveals the runes as an endless listing of beings killed by the followers of Erivatius.

Baucojin has already installed the *tablet of sacrifice* in the center of the triangular pedestal. A DC 50 Search check allows a character to notice the tablet embedded in the top of the platform; it is nearly identical to the surrounding stone and fits into its depression perfectly, leaving no visible seam. The tablet radiates an overwhelming abjuration aura, so if *detect magic* or a similar effect is used to examine the dais, the *tablet of sacrifice* is immediately noticeable.

Anyone can place the *tablet of sacrifice* into the dais, as Baucojin has already done. Once placed, the Quicksilver Hourglass continues to build temporal energy until it activates. Removing the tablet is a simple matter for anyone wearing the *Bindings of Erivatius*. For anyone else, a tablet installed in the dais is nearly impossible to remove. As part of the Quicksilver Hourglass' divine nature, the dais itself cannot be harmed by mortal magic or damage. The only method to remove the *tablet of sacrifice* from the dais that doesn't involve the *Bindings of Erivatius* is to successfully affect the tablet with *Mordenkainen's disjunction* or an epic *dispelling* spell.

The tablet itself is a major artifact with a caster level of 40. Destroying the tablet immediately alerts Erivatius and his minions here in the Hourglass.

Unfortunately, destroying or removing the *tablet of sacrifice* is only the first step in the two-step process required to disarm the Quicksilver Hourglass. In order to complete their goal, the PCs must install the *tablet of reckoning* directly into Erivatius' prison (see the Prison Tetrahedron).

Creatures: Baucojin is not happy at being trapped in this tetrahedron by the colossal dragon in the Nexus, aided by a mere fraction of his original horde of minions, but is trusting to his belief that he controls all necessary pieces of the ritual. He feels that his plan cannot be stopped as long as this situation holds. The phane knows nothing of the agreement Vourzoun made with the rulers of Mechanus, and so could not tell Baucojin of the alternate ritual and second tablet.

Aoorxiat the phane floats over the dais, enraptured by the release of the Quicksilver Hourglass's chronal energy. It is insubstantial, roughly humanoid in shape with overly long arms and three emerald eyes burning from its shadowy form with an otherworldly spark.

Baucojin begins each day by casting *epic mage armor* on himself.

Baucojin, "The Crimson Eclipse," male human vampire sorcerer 29: CR 31; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 29d12; hp 188; Init +17; Spd 30 ft.; AC 57, touch 26, flat-footed 48; Base Atk +15, Grp +17; Atk +19 melee (1d6+5, *staff of power*) or +17 melee (1d6+2 plus energy drain, slam); Full Atk +19/+14 melee (1d6+5, *staff of power*) or +17 melee (1d6+2 plus energy drain, slam); SA blood drain, create spawn, dominate (DC 37), energy drain, spells; SQ alternate form, damage reduction 10/silver and magic, fast healing 5, gaseous form, resistance to cold 10, resistance to electricity 10, spider climb, summon familiar, turn resistance +4, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +12, Ref +23, Will +23; Str 14, Dex 29, Con —, Int 14, Wis 20, Cha 37.

Skills: Bluff +53, Concentration +32, Diplomacy +31, Hide +17, Intimidate +23, Knowledge (arcana) +34, Listen +15, Move Silently +17, Search +10, Sense Motive +15, Spellcraft +36, Spot +15.

Feats: Alertness[B], Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes[B], Craft Staff, Craft Wondrous Item, Dodge[B], Epic Spell Focus (evocation), Epic Spellcasting, Forge Ring, Greater Spell Focus (evocation), Improved Combat Casting, Improved Initiative[B], Improved Spell Capacity (2), Lightning Reflexes[B], Maximize Spell, Spell Focus (evocation), Superior Initiative.

Languages: Common, Draconic, Elven.

Sorcerer Spells Known (caster level 29; +24 ranged touch; 6/10/9/9/15/9/8/8/8/8 /2/2, epic 3/day, ranged touch +24): 0—*arcane mark, dancing lights, detect magic, mage hand, message, open/close, ray of frost, read magic, touch of fatigue* (DC 23); 1st—*identify, magic missile, protection from good, shocking grasp, true strike*; 2nd—*darkness, invisibility, mirror image, scorching ray, summon monster II*; 3rd—*displacement, haste, fireball* (DC 29), *lightning bolt* (DC 29); 4—*dimension door, greater invisibility, scrying, shout* (DC 30); 5—*baleful polymorph* (DC 28), *Bigby's interposing hand, sending, summon monster V*; 6—*chain lightning* (DC 32), *disintegrate* (DC 29), *mislead* (DC 29); 7— *delayed blast fireball* (DC 33), *forcecage, greater teleport*; 8—*polar ray, polymorph any object* (DC 31), *greater prying eyes*; 9—*energy drain, meteor swarm* (DC 35), *wish*; Epic—*epic mage armor, eclipse, mummy dust, locate timevoid**.

Note: Baucojin has 25,000 XP to call upon for the casting of *wish* spells.

Possessions: *Staff of power* (30 charges), *bracers of armor +8, amulet of natural armor +5, cloak of Charisma +6, ring of protection +5* (does not take a ring slot), *major ring of spell storing* (contains *harm* and *inflict critical wounds*), *ring of wizardry (IV), gloves of Dexterity +6*, scroll of *time stop* and *limited wish*, ruby dust worth 6,000 gp (material component for *forcecage*), *true seeing* ointment worth 1,000 gp, three doses of specially prepared mummy dust worth 10,000 gp each (for *mummy dust*).

*This epic spell is the one Baucojin used to locate the Quicksilver Hourglass; details on this spell are unimportant to this adventure since Baucojin need never cast it again.

Klifer, bat familiar: hp 94; *Monster Manual* 268.

Aoorxiat, phane: hp 612; *Epic Level Handbook* 166.

Tactics: Baucojin and the phane are powerful opponents, but they do not coordinate their actions. If warned by Ivirere, Baucojin casts *mirror image, haste,* and *displacement* on himself. In combat, he casts offensive spells or spells from his staff. His favorite spells are *meteor swarm, forcecage,* maximized *polar rays,* and maximized *delayed blast fireballs.* If it appears he is about to be defeated, he uses *wish* to exit the Quicksilver Hourglass and then tries to escape through the portal back to the Material Plane. If he does this, he uses a second *wish* to destroy the portal, trapping those left behind in the timevoid with no way to escape until Erivatius is destroyed. His reaction to inescapable situations beyond this is to make a retributive strike with his *staff of power.* Baucojin stays at least 40 feet away from the phane at all times to avoid being caught in its null time field.

The phane does not leave the dais until combat is brought to it. Once engaged, it fights to the end in a possessed rage, unwilling to lose this chance to untie the chronal knot that has plagued it for so long.

Development: If somehow interrogated, Baucojin reveals extensive details about his past and the Union of Eclipses. He knows the full ritual for releasing Erivatius using the tablet set in the dais, but has no knowledge of any alternate rituals. From his observations in battle with the followers of Erivatius, he knows they possess the *Bindings of Erivatius.*

The Temple Tetrahedron

The portal from the Nexus Tetrahedron to the Temple Tetrahedron is located 60 feet up a wall, above area **T2** (but outside the temple structure), and characters who pass through find themselves falling toward the roof of the temple, 30 feet below. Most of the volume of this tetrahedron is occupied by a large building, damaged where it touches the tetrahedron's skin. The imposing architecture almost certainly indicates this is the temple of a

fell god, and its massive steel doors stand closed and undamaged.

As the Monastery Tetrahedron houses the greatest monastery of Erivatius, this tetrahedron houses his greatest temple. Only a few servants and infernal guardians remain here, as all available forces were sent to stand with Voursuol against Baucojin in the Nexus Tetrahedron. The worshipers of Erivatius who remain within once embraced Erivatius' decision to sacrifice himself to ruin the Material Plane, but over the ages their isolation and constantly increasing fanaticism has warped this devotion. Today, the surviving faithful of Erivatius believe that the divine war destroyed everything but the Quicksilver Hourglass, and their support of Erivatius' suicide has been replaced by an intense desire to preserve him forever. The arrival of Baucojin and his minions has shaken their faith to the core, for they had, up to this point, believed that everything else had been destroyed. Many of their number fell to the vampire and his minions in their attempt to defend the tablet of sacrifice and the Hall of Inertia. Now, the remaining few monks and their cleric leader Beshejaer desperately try to come up with a plan to destroy Baucojin, reverse the Quicksilver Hourglass' activation, and return their world to the way it was. They feel that their current forces are no match for Baucojin's unless they can lure the vampires or their minions back into the Nexus Tetrahedron somehow so the draconic guardian of that area can aid them.

The temple is composed of superior masonry walls and flagstone floors with no special properties. Double doors are 15 feet high, single doors are 10 feet high, and ceilings are vaulted and 30 feet high except where rooms are open to the tetrahedron's walls.

T1. Hall of Obeisance (EL 29)

A gigantic stern visage in bas relief faces the entry to this chamber, with a skeletal hand depicted above and below. The eyes of the visage are hollow sockets that weep jagged tears of lead. Elaborate double doors flank the cold countenance.

The face of Erivatius greets guests to this temple. The chamber was designed for defense against intruders, with archers manning the arrow slits when they were available.

Creatures: Gurvitus, Hahsivatu, Iorian, and Zerghezun, the four monks who survived Baucojin's invasion of the Quicksilver Hourglass, stand guard here. All four are in prime physical health, and have shaven heads and grey eyes. They have tattooed a jagged set of silvery tears onto their faces, weeping down from their eyes in honor of their deity's appearance. Each has also tattooed hundreds of names on their arms, legs, torsos and back—the names of those they personally slew and thus delivered to Erivatius before they became willing prisoners of the Quicksilver Hourglass.

Gurvitus, Hahsivatu, Iorian, and Zerghezun, human monk 25: CR 25; Medium outsider (augmented humanoid); HD 25d8+100; hp 212; Init +10; Spd 110 ft.; AC 43, touch 35, flat-footed 37; Base Atk +18; Grp +22; Atk +25 melee (2d10+4/19–20, unarmed strike); Full Atk +30/+30/+30/+25/+20 melee (2d10+4/19-20, unarmed strike/flurry of blows); SA *ki* strike (magic lawful adamantine), quivering palm (DC 31), stunning fist (28/day, DC 31), unarmed strike; SQ abundant step, diamond body, diamond soul (spell resistance 35), empty body, fast movement (+80 ft.), improved evasion, outsider traits, perfect self (damage reduction 10/magic), purity of body, slow fall, still mind, timeless body, tongue of the sun and moon, wholeness of body (heal 50 hp); AL LE; SV Fort +18, Ref +22, Will +23; Str 19, Dex 22, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 29, Cha 16.

Skills: Balance +36, Jump +66, Listen +37, Spot +37, Tumble +34.

Feats: Blind-Fight, Deflect Arrows[B], Dire Charge, Dodge, Epic Prowess, Exceptional Deflection, Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Initiative, Improved Trip[B], Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Lightning Reflexes, Mobility, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist[B], Weapon Finesse.

Languages: Ancient Common.

Possessions: Cloak of major displacement, bracers of armor +8, amulet of health +6, gloves of Dexterity +6, belt of giant Strength +6, periapt of Wisdom +6, ring of protection +5.

Tactics: The monks hope to slow the advance of any invaders, but retreat back to area **T2** if pressed, to make a final stand with Beshejaer.

T2. Hall of Battle (EL 31)

This richly-appointed hall has a martial theme, with weapons and armor of excellent quality displayed on the walls. The space is commanded by a pulpit that looms over the room. A four-foot-by-three-foot shimmering portal is clearly visible in the floor.

This hall served as a mustering area for the troops before presentation to the priests of the temple. Beshejaer has now taken it as her final bastion, avoiding her old quarters to the north which are now dominated by the blackstone gigant.

The portal in the floor leads to the Prison Tetrahedron.

Creatures: Beshejaer, the high priest of the temple of Erivatius, is encountered here, along with the last of the three barbed devil blackguards that serve her needs. She also has a *contingent resurrection* in effect.

Beshejaer, female half-fiend human cleric 27 (Erivatius): CR 30; Medium outsider (native, augmented humanoid); HD 27d8+135; hp 256; Init +2; Spd 20 ft. in full plate armor, fly 30 ft. (average); AC 37, touch 16, flat-footed 36; Base Atk +19; Grp +25; Atk +30 melee (1d8+11, *+5 axiomatic unholy heavy mace*); Full Atk +30/+25/+20 melee (1d8+11, *+5 axiomatic unholy heavy mace*); SA smite good 1/day (+20 damage), spells, spell-like abilities, rebuke undead; SQ *contingent resurrection*, damage reduction 10/magic, darkvision 60 ft., immune to poison, outsider traits, resistance to acid 10, cold 10, electricity 10, and fire 10, spell resistance 35; AL LE; SV Fort +29, Ref +16, Will +31; Str 22, Dex 14, Con 20, Int 14, Wis 33, Cha 22.

Skills: Concentration +35, Diplomacy +36, Heal +41, Knowledge (religion) +32, Spellcraft +45.

Feats: Automatic Quicken Spell, Combat Casting, Heightened Spell, Epic Fortitude, Epic Skill Focus (spellcraft), Epic Spellcasting, Improved Initiative, Multispell, Quicken Spell, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*poison*), Scribe scroll, Skill Focus (spellcraft), Spell Penetration.

Languages: Ancient Common, Infernal, Terran.

Spell-Like Abilities (Caster level 27th): 3/day—*darkness*, quickened *poison* (DC 20), *unholy aura* (DC 24); 1/day—*blasphemy* (DC 23), *contagion* (DC 19), *desecrate*, *destruction* (DC 23), *horrid wilting* (DC 24), *summon monster IX* (fiends only, does not function in the Quicksilver Hourglass), *unhallow*, *unholy blight* (DC 20).

Cleric Spells Prepared (caster level 27th; touch +25; ranged touch +21): 0 (all quickened)—*cure minor wounds*, *detect magic*, *guidance* (4); 1st (all quickened)—*bless*, *cause fear*[D] (DC 22), *cure light wounds* (3), *divine favor*, *doom* (DC 22), *protection from good*, *sanctuary*; 2nd (all quickened)—*cure moderate wounds* (4), *death knell*[D] (DC 23), *hold person* (DC 23), *remove paralysis*, *silence* (DC 23), *zone of truth* (DC 23); 3rd (all quickened)—*bestow curse* (DC 24), *clairaudience/clairvoyance*[D], *cure serious wounds* (2), *dispel magic*, *meld into stone*, *prayer*, *searing light*, *wind wall* (DC 24); 4th—*cure critical wounds*, *death ward*[D], *divine power* (2), *freedom of movement*, *poison* (DC 25), *spell immunity*, *tongues*; 5th—*greater command* (DC 26), *flame strike* (2) (DC 26), *righteous might*, *slay living* (DC 26), *slay living*[D] (DC 26), *spell resistance*, *true seeing*; 6th—*blade barrier* (DC 27), *find the path*[D], *greater dispel magic*, *harm* (2) (DC 27), *heal* (2); 7th—*blasphemy* (DC 28), *mass cure serious wounds*, *destruction* (2) (DC 28), *dictum* (DC 28), *legend lore*[D], *repulsion* (DC 28); 8th—*antimagic field*, quickened *death ward*, *discern location*[D], *firestorm* (DC 29), *greater spell immunity*, quickened *spell immunity*; 9th—*energy drain*, *foresight*[D], *mass heal*, *implosion* (DC 30), quickened *slay living* (DC 26) *true resurrection*; epic—*let go of me* (DC 31), *mass frog* (DC 31), *spell worm* (DC 31).

D: Domain spell. *Domains*: Death (death touch 1/day, 27d6 damage), Knowledge (cast divination spells at +1 caster level).

Epic Spells Known: *Animus blast*, *contingent resurrection*, *let go of me*, *mass frog*, *spell worm*.

Possessions: *Bindings of Erivatius*, *+5 heavy fortification full plate armor*, *+5 heavy steel shield*, *+3 axiomatic unholy heavy mace*, *belt of giant Strength +6*, *helmet of Wisdom +6*, *cloak of Charisma +6*, *ring of protection +5*, *ring of resistance +5* (as *cloak of resistance +5*), diamonds worth 25,000 gp (material component for *true resurrection*), ointment of mushroom powder, saffron, and fat worth 750 gp (material component for *true seeing*), and silvered unholy symbol worth 500 gp (focus for *destruction*).

Advanced barbed devil blackguard 8: hp 479; see page 67.

Tactics: Beshejaer and her barbed devil guardian do everything in their power to stop the characters here. If given warning of the party's approach, Beshejaer casts *foresight*, *greater spell immunity* (*temporal stasis*, *polymorph any object*, *delayed blast fireball*, *disintegrate*, *power word stun*, *horrid wilting*, *feeblemind*), *righteous might*, and *divine power* on herself and quickened *spell immunity* (*enervation*, *bestow curse*, *confusion*, *ray of exhaustion*, *hold person*, *lightning bolt*, *fireball*) and *death ward* on the barbed devil.

Development: Note that Beshejaer has a *contingent resurrection* spell in effect, and if the spell restores her after the party has departed, she pursues them. Under interrogation, Beshejaer can tell the PCs about the recent invasion of the Quicksilver Hourglass, but won't reveal more unless magically compelled to do so. Under such compulsion, she can inform the PCs about the fact that two rituals exist: one to activate the Hourglass and allow Erivatius to sacrifice himself, and one to call him into physical form in his prison without activating the Hourglass. She also knows that destruction of the *Bindings of Erivatius* would weaken Erivatius. Divulging this information is against her very nature, and could grant her an additional saving throw to resist the effects of whatever spell is compelling her to talk.

THE BINDINGS OF ERIVATIUS (MAJOR ARTIFACT)

Erivatius wore these loose bindings upon his forearms, but when he volunteered for his imprisonment in the Quicksilver Hourglass, he gave them to his high priestess. He hoped secretly that after his sacrifice, he would emerge from death even more powerful than before, using these *Bindings* and his high priest as a focus for his return from death.

Each binding is a strip of rune-covered cloth. The left is known as the *Binding of Inertia*, and is cloth of a sickly shade of yellow, shot through with verdigris. The right is the *Binding of Decay*, made of dead whitish-gray rune-covered cloth. When worn, the bindings give the wearer two slam attacks, each of which inflicts 2d6 damage on a hit. The *Binding of Decay* acts as an *amulet of mighty fists +5*. Damage done by the wearer's unarmed and natural attacks is considered lawful and evil for the purposes of overcoming damage reduction. In addition, it allows the wearer to afflict anyone he strikes with his natural weapons or unarmed strikes with mummy rot if the victim fails a DC 20 Fortitude save. The *Binding of Inertia* provides the wearer with damage reduction 10/adamantine and bludgeoning, immunity to critical hits and sneak attacks, and immunity to cold. Wearing both bindings conveys immunity to magical aging.

The bindings hold fast (DC 40 Strength or Escape Artist to remove) to any living wearer and immediately imbue their powers, regardless of the alignment of the wearer. Any non-evil wearer immediately gains two negative energy levels while any non-lawful wearer immediately gains four negative levels (these negative levels stack for nonevil and nonlawful wearers) as long as the bindings are worn. If these negative levels reduce the victim to 0 level, he immediately dies and rises in 1d4 rounds as a wight. The bindings slough off the newly created wight when it rises.

The bindings can be destroyed, individually or together, by wrapping them around an anarchic magic item (or an intelligent magic item with a chaotic alignment component) and a holy magic item (or an intelligent magic item with a good alignment component) and subjecting them to a *sunray* and either a *wish* or *miracle*. They can also be destroyed by successful *Mordenkainen's disjunction*. If either binding is destroyed, Erivatius takes a –5 penalty on all attack rolls, saves, caster level checks, and skill checks until one year passes or he creates a replacement. If both bindings are destroyed, this penalty increases to –10.

T3. Chapel (EL 30)

A colossal sculpture fills this chamber, an eight-armed woman with exaggerated, cruel features carved from ebon stone, her face leering down at the entrance while two hands cup a stone tablet in front of her. While the stone walls of the chamber have crumbled where they meet the tetrahedron's surface, the sculpture is neatly crouched within the space's confines.

This chapel to Erivatius contains the key to his defeat, but Vourzoun has put an end to its use as a place of veneration by filling it with a guardian to prevent a premature end to his imprisonment.

Creatures: The colossal sculpture is in fact a massive blackstone gigant, a construct created by Vourzoun.

Advanced Blackstone Gigant: CR 30; Colossal construct; HD 76d10+80; hp 498; Init +1; Spd 40 ft., climb 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (perfect); AC 40, touch 3, flat-footed 39; Base Atk +57; Grp +97; Atk +74 melee (8d8+24/19–20 plus petrification, slam); Full Atk +74 melee (8d8+24/19–20 plus petrification 4 slams); Space/Reach 30 ft./30 ft.; SA petrification, trample; SQ animate statue, construct traits, damage reduction 15/adamantine, resistance to acid 20, resistance to cold 20, resistance to electricity 20, resistance to fire 20, spell resistance 40; AL NE; SV Fort +25, Ref +28, Will +27; Str 59, Dex 12, Con —, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10, *Fiend Folio* 21.

Skills: Climb +43, Listen +34, Spot +34.

Feats: Ability Focus (petrification), Blind-Fight, Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Devastating Critical (slam), Flyby Attack, Great Cleave, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Critical (slam), Improved Natural Armor (5), Improved Natural Attack (slam), Improved Spell Resistance (4), Improved Sunder, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Overwhelming Critical (slam), Power Attack, Snatch, Weapon Focus (slam).

Languages: Abyssal.

Petrifaction (Su): Whenever the blackstone gigant damages an opponent with a slam attack, that creature must make a Fort save (DC 50) or be turned into a stone statue as per the spell *flesh to stone* cast by a 20th-level caster.

Trample (Ex): As a standard action, the blackstone gigant can trample opponents at least one size category smaller than itself. This attack deals 12d8+36 points of bludgeoning damage. A trampled opponent can attempt either an attack of opportunity at a –4 penalty or a Reflex save (DC 72) for half damage.

Animate Statue (Su): The blackstone gigant can use one or more of its attacks to touch and animate any creatures it turned to stone with its petrification power. This ability works like an *animate objects* spell cast by a 20th-level caster, except that it works on creatures of any size. Statues remain animated for 20 rounds. A blackstone gigant cannot animate a petrified creature more than once.

Tactics: The gigant takes no action until it is attacked or something tries to affect or take the tablet it caries. Due to the limited headroom here for a 30-foot construct,

treat the gigant as "squeezing through a space" (*Player's Handbook* 151) while it is within the chapel. This shouldn't last long though—the gigant spends its first round of combat smashing through the front wall of the chapel (making four attacks with a 51-point Power Attack adjustment). It has been programmed to protect the tablet, and it holds it safely with two of its hands throughout combat.

Treasure: The stone tablet in the gigant's hands radiates an overwhelming magical aura of the abjuration school. This is the *tablet of reckoning*; it is required to force Erivatius to manifest physically, in theory to face judgment by the rulers of Mechanus.

Development: If the gigant destroys 3 or more 10-foot-by-10-foot sections of the wall, the entire wall collapses. Treat the collapsing wall as a cave-in (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 66). Once the wall is down, rubble fills areas **T2** and **T3**, making movement through these areas slow and difficult.

T4. Vestry

Cassocks, chasubles, and palliums of various fabrics and colors hang in this dressing area, while the many cabinets likely hold even more. Mirrors and artwork line the walls.

The temple priests prepared themselves in this chamber before entering the chapel.

Treasure: The vestry contains valuable apparel, statuettes, and tapestries. Characters who stop to look can find 15 various religious articles worth 500 gp each, although identifying and stowing the valuable objects takes 15 minutes. Of much greater value is a single scroll, hidden in a cabinet drawer's false bottom (Search DC 30). Penned by one of the hierarchs of Mechanus, the words on the scroll at first glance seem to be strange tangles of triangles, cubes, and circles, but as soon as the reader blinks the shapes instantly reform into his native language. These words detail the agreement between Vourzoun and the rulers of Mechanus, including full details on both the steps necessary to activate the Quicksilver Hourglass (the *tablet of sacrifice* need simply be placed in the proper receptacle in the Hall of Inertia) and the steps necessary to force Erivatius to manifest physically for judgment. Part of this agreement stipulates that the scroll must be kept near Erivatius' prison, so that should Vourzoun's minions pass from existence, record of the wishes of Mechanus would persist. The scroll is itself a major artifact, and is nearly impossible to destroy.

T5. High Priest's Chamber

These lavish quarters want for nothing. A grand bed is surrounded by fine furniture encrusted with gemstones. The walls are covered with bookcases and the space is awash in artwork of a grim nature.

This is the personal chamber of Beshejaer, the high priest of the temple. She has not been back here since the invasion of the Quicksilver Hourglass.

Treasure: The chamber contains many valuable objects, including jewelry, statuettes, tomes, and tapestries. Characters who stop to look can find 20 objects worth 1,000 gp each, although identifying and stowing the valuable objects takes 30 minutes. Characters who make an attempt to quickly sort through the writings can make a Search check (DC 40) to pick out a passage describing a combat in which an angel known as the Trumpeter nearly slew Erivatius, a reference to his lack of protection against sonic attacks.

T6. Empty Menagerie

The thick iron bars subdividing this chamber make clear its former purpose. Judging by the size of the cell doors, large creatures could have been kept here.

Several half-fiend truly horrid umber hulks were once kept in these cages. When Baucojin invaded, the followers of Erivatius used these monsters in an attempt to stop the invasion at the Nexus, but the creatures were all soundly defeated.

The Prison Tetrahedron (EL 29)

This chamber is a stone hemisphere with a yellow and verdigris dome fifty feet high, one hundred feet across, and a perfectly level stone floor. Seven statues ring the chamber, twenty-foot-tall expressionless warriors dressed in gleaming full plate armor, each standing before a five-foot-by-five-foot mithral plaque bearing a single rune.

The walls of the prison chamber are solid stone, extending to the walls of the tetrahedron, and the chamber is infused with an *unhallow* and *bane* effect. The only means of entry or exit is the portal centered in the floor.

The seven plaques before the "statues" (in fact, the room's guardians) are the keys to stopping the Quicksilver Hourglass from bringing doom to the Material Plane. Each plaque bears a different rune that symbolizes a specific plane or dimension; the Astral, the Ethereal, the Positive Energy Plane, the Negative Energy Plane, the demiplane of Time, the Far Realm, and the Material Plane. A successful DC 30 Knowledge (the planes) check identifies each. The scroll hidden in area **T4** also identifies what each of the plaques mean.

Creatures: The rulers of Mechanus feared that leaving Vourzoun and Erivatius unwatched over the eons would eventually result in disaster, so as part of their accord with the evil goddess, they were allowed to place seven of their most powerful maruts in Erivatius' prison as guardians. These maruts wait here still; they are the seven expressionless warriors that stand along the chamber's perimeter. They remain motionless until they notice someone other than one of the hierarchs of Mechanus attempting to release Erivatius using the *tablet of reckoning*, at which point they animate and demand that the interlopers cease immediately. If their commands are not met, the maruts attack, seeking to destroy the intruders and return the *tablet of reckoning* to area **T3**.

Advanced maruts (7): CR 23; Huge construct (extraplanar, lawful); HD

43d10+40; hp 276 each; Init +0; Spd 30 ft.; AC 42, touch 8, flat-footed 42; Base Atk +32; Grp +56; Atk +46 melee (4d6+16 plus 3d6 sonic or 3d6 electricity, slam); Full Atk +46 melee (4d6+16 plus 3d6 sonic or 3d6 electricity, 2 slams); Space/Reach 15 ft./15 ft.; SA fists of thunder and lightning (DC 49), spell-like abilities; SQ construct traits, damage reduction 15/chaotic, darkvision 60 ft., fast healing 10, low-light vision, spell resistance 29; SV Fort +19, Ref +17, Will +20; Str 43, Dex 11, Con —, Int 12, Wis 17, Cha 18; *Monster Manual* 159.

Skills: Concentration +23, Diplomacy +6, Knowledge (religion) +24, Listen +26, Search +24, Sense Motive +26, Spot +26.

Feats: Ability Focus (fists of thunder and lightning), Awesome Blow, Combat Casting, Epic Fortitude, Epic Reflexes, Epic Will, Great Fortitude, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Combat Casting, Improved Natural Armor (2), Improved Natural Attack (slam), Improved Spell Resistance (2), Power Attack.

Languages: Abyssal, Celestial, Common, Infernal.

Spell-Like Abilities (caster level 14th): At will—*air walk, greater command* (DC 19), *dimension door, greater dispel magic, fear* (DC 18), *mass inflict light wounds* (DC 19), *locate creature, true seeing*; 1/day—*chain lightning* (DC 20), *circle of death* (DC 20), *mark of justice, wall of force*; 1/week—*earthquake* (DC 22), *geas/quest, plane shift* (DC 21).

Possessions: *+5 full plate armor.*

Tactics: In combat, the maruts engage in melee, using their Awesome Blow and Power Attack abilities. If they hit an opponent with both slam attacks in a round, they take a 10-point Power Attack adjustment against that opponent in the following round, continuing to increase the modifier by 10 each round until they no longer hit with either attack. They coordinate their movements and space themselves to compensate for their lack of speed, and use *wall of force* to restructure the battlefield and divide the party. Any maruts not involved in melee use *true seeing* at the first opportunity, then *greater dispel magic* as they observe foes benefiting from magical effects. They fight to the death without hesitation.

Erivatius in Judgement (EL 34)

Once the PCs have dealt with the maruts, the path is clear for them to put a stop to the menace represented by the Quicksilver Hourglass. In order to shut the Hourglass down now that it has been activated, they must destroy the source of the weapon's power. In short, they must destroy a god.

Erivatius is currently merged with the Quicksilver Hourglass, and cannot be harmed. In order to destroy him, the PCs must first remove the *tablet of sacrifice* from its cradle in area **H2**. They must then activate the seven plaques spaced around the perimeter of the Prison Tetrahedron by touching the *Bindings of Erivatius* to them in the proper order (Astral, Ethereal, Positive Energy, Negative Energy, Time, Far Realm, and finally Material Plane), after which point they must wrap the *Bindings* around the *tablet of judgment* while standing in this room. The tablet must then be placed in the portal exit from the Prison Tetrahedron. Doing so immediately suppresses the portal and draws Erivatius' essence out of the Quicksilver Hourglass and forces the god to physically manifest in the Prison Tetrahedron.

Erivatius: hp 750; see Appendix.

Tactics: Erivatius is a god, yet he is not without common sense. He immediately understands that the party is extremely powerful to have made it to the Prison Tetrahedron and forced him to manifest physically. He attempts to get a measure of the characters through parley if they are willing, offering them anything in his power if they agree to find a way to set him free. Of course, Erivatius has teetered on the brink of suicide for eons, and as a result has little left but the desire to see his sacrifice through to the end. If the PCs allow him to go free, he immediately retreats back into the Quicksilver Hourglass and allows it to drain his divine essence completely. The *tablet of judgment* cannot be used to force him to manifest again; if the PCs allow this to happen, they have sealed the Material Plane's doom.

If Erivatius fails to win the characters over with words, he attacks them in desperation. He begins by activating the resolve power of his divine aura, followed by his life drain salient divine ability, and then engages in melee, attacking with a 20-point Power Attack and using stunning fist on his first strike each round. If unable to melee, he uses his divine blast salient divine ability, *destruction*, and *wail of the banshee* as ranged attacks and *foresight, shield of law*, and *righteous might* to bolster his defenses. Throughout combat, Erivatius recites the details of the deaths of the characters' ancestors and associates (using his divine recall salient divine ability), particularly any that were ignoble, drawing possible parallels to their current situation.

Although Erivatius has great melee powers and a variety of ranged attacks, he is also vulnerable to attacks from the characters—he has no resistance to critical hits or sonic attacks, and very little ability to heal himself. Depending upon the party's strength, you may want to emphasize hints of these weaknesses before this encounter.

Ad-hoc XP Adjustment: If the characters defeat Erivatius, award the party XP as if they had defeated a CR 34 creature.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

As Erivatius is destroyed, a strange being appears, standing twelve feet in height, human-like in appearance save for small horns jutting from its bald head, a tail ending in a mace-like ball, and a too-perfect symmetry. It speaks sonorously in Common: "By ad hoc trial of arms is the covenant forged among that deity known as Erivatius, that deity known as Vourzoun, and the One and the Prime hereby dissolved." It dips its head in concentration and the stone hemisphere of the Prison Tetrahedron melts away, leaving the PCs standing in a tetrahedron 180 feet on a side, with walls of crackling energy, identical to the portals they have come to recognize.

One round later, another being appears, this one of an entirely different nature: a woman of possibly elven ancestry and typical height, but otherworldly beauty. Stars fall from her shimmering mantle, and her violet eyes are both playful and ancient. This is Morwel, the Queen of Stars, a powerful and unique eladrin. She speaks with a soothing energy. "Through excellence, sacrifice, and a pinch of luck, you have gifted opportunity to countless souls to strive and love and live. Sacrifice it was to you—shall I do no less?" As she closes her eyes, a weight lifts from the PCs, rejuvenation swells through them, and her aura seems to dim slightly.

The first being to appear is a tertian modron, a hierarch of Mechanus, tasked with passing judgment on fulfillment of agreements made with his ultimate superior, Primus. Once Erivatius was killed and the tertian passed his judgment, the timevoid around the Quicksilver Hourglass dissolved and the Hourglass emerged into the Astral Plane, inert and harmless. Morwel was sufficiently moved by Ojhalia's petition on the characters' behalf to aid them. Her temporary sacrifice reverses all of the aging suffered by the characters in the Hourglass, but does not stop there: each character also receives the benefits of a *greater restoration*, *true resurrection* (if deceased), and a permanent +2 sacred bonus to an ability of their choice.

The tertian doesn't approve of her actions, stating flatly, "An unwarranted risk, considering the danger all now face."

Morwel opens her eyes, playful again. "By your calculus, yes! It puts me of a mind to take another!" A brilliant rapier appears in her hand and she feints an attack toward the modron, which actually seems to flinch slightly at the playful threat. It shakes its head and vanishes back to Mechanus, leaving Morwel to speak with the PCs. You can use her to answer any questions the PCs may still have. Eventually, Morwel says, "Your quest was great, your rewards to match, and though there can be no doubt but that accounts have been balanced, know you yet that the Court of Stars favors you!" With that she disappears, the walls of crackling energy fade, and the PCs find themselves back on the Material Plane.

At the same time, a roughly tetrahedral monolith appears in the Astral Plane—all that remains of the Quicksilver Hourglass.

The party may become involved in working against what remains of the Union of Eclipses, particularly if Huersefful escaped them and assumed control of the Union. Any surviving servants of Erivatius certainly devote themselves to revenge against the characters. And what of the mysterious threat mentioned by Ojhalia, a threat so dire that Mechanus and Arborea appear to be ready to align against it? Epic characters would surely be eager to meet such a menace head-on.

APPENDIX: ERIVATIUS

The Lord of Inertia,
The Final Guest
Demigod
Symbol: Iron triangle with inward-pointing barbs
Home Plane: Not applicable (imprisoned within the Quicksilver Hourglass)
Alignment: Lawful Evil
Portfolio: Aging, death
Worshipers: Monks, law enforcement, executioners, those who seek to cheat death
Cleric Alignments: LE, LN, NE
Domains: Death, Knowledge, Law
Favored Weapon: Unarmed strike

Erivatius is the god of death and aging from a long-forgotten pantheon. He appears as a 13-foot tall humanoid with ashen skin, skeletal hands and forearms, and eyes of molten lead that perceive all and promise oblivion to all who meet their gaze. Lead runs down his cheeks to drip from the sides of his face, forming a thick jagged "beard" of metal that flakes away to dust and shards as it reaches the ground. Fine silver runes cover his body, representing every great mortal that has succumbed to his domain.

Erivatius is a god of strict discipline and rigid hierarchies, and as such is embraced by those seeking domination of others through oppressive laws and dictatorial regimes.

Dogma

The teachings of Erivatius oppose any type of undeath, viewing such as an affront to their master's dominion over the measure of life. The establishment of laws by the strong and able is demanded of his followers, and regulated competition among them for power is openly encouraged.

Clergy and Temples

Clerics of Erivatius, despite their hatred of unlife, still rebuke and command undead. They often use this ability to force undead to fight and destroy other undead.

Erivatius

Cleric 10/Monk 20
Large Outsider (Lawful, Evil, Extraplanar)
Divine Rank: 5
Hit Dice: 50d8+350 (750 hp)
Initiative: +13
Speed: 140 ft.
Armor Class: 64 (–1 size, +9 Dex, +5 divine, +18 natural armor, +9 deflection, +14 monk), touch 46, flat-footed 55
Base Attack/Grapple: +35/+61
Attack: +60 melee (4d10+17/19–20, unarmed strike)
Full Attack: +60/+60/+60/+55/+50 melee (4d10+17/19–20, unarmed strike)
Space/Reach: 10 ft./10 ft.
Special Attacks: Does not automatically fail on attack roll of 1, ki strike (unarmed attacks are treated as epic magic lawful adamantine weapons), quivering palm 1/day (DC 30, 1/day), spells, spell-like abilities, stunning fist 27/day (DC 45), rebuke undead.
Special Qualities: Abundant step, communication, damage reduction 15/epic, divine aura, divine immunities, divine senses, domain powers, draining divinity, empty body, evasion, fast movement, immortality, improved evasion, salient divine abilities, resistance to fire 10, slow fall (any distance) spell resistance 43, still mind, travel, wholeness of body.
Saves: Fort +39, Ref +41, Will +42; does not automatically fail on save roll of 1.
Abilities: Str 35, Dex 29, Con 24, Int 25, Wis 30, Cha 29.
Skills: Balance +61, Climb +40, Concentration +65, Diplomacy +29, Escape Artist +34, Heal +30, Hide +53, Jump +108, Knowledge (arcana) +45, Knowledge (history) +45, Knowledge (religion) +65, Knowledge (the planes) +45, Listen +58, Move Silently +57, Sense Motive +58, Spellcraft +49, Spot 58, Tumble +57.

Erivatius

Feats: Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Deflect Arrows[B], Dodge, Epic Weapon Focus (unarmed strike), Improved Combat Reflexes, Improved Critical (unarmed strike), Improved Disarm, Improved Initiative, Improved Ki Strike, Improved Spell Resistance (3), Improved Trip[B], Improved Unarmed Strike[B], Legendary Wrestler, Mobility, Power Attack, Spring Attack, Stunning Fist[B], Weapon Focus (unarmed strike)

Divine Immunities: Polymorphing, petrification, attacks that alter his form, energy drain, ability drain, ability damage, mind-affecting effects, electricity, cold, acid, disease, poison, stunning, sleep, paralysis, death effects, and disintegration.

Salient Divine Abilities: Erivatius has the following salient divine abilities:

Divine Blast 12/day: Ray, ranged touch attack, range equals up to one mile per divine rank, damage 9d12 + 1d12 per divine rank, no save. This damage bypasses all damage reduction and energy resistance. The ray looks like a stream of the names of all those who have been claimed by Erivatius. It destroys any *wall of force, prismatic wall,* or *prismatic sphere* it hits, passing through the effect to strike its intended target.

Divine Monk: Erivatius' unarmed strikes are treated as magic slashing weapons with an enhancement bonus of +5 and the keen, axiomatic, and vorpal qualities. If Erivatius chooses, a particular attack can be bludgeoning instead of slashing, but the keen and vorpal qualities do not apply to that attack. He can use the Deflect Arrows feat to deflect any ranged attacks (including spells requiring ranged touch attacks) as if they were arrows, can deflect any number of attacks in a round, and reflects deflected attacks upon the attacker using his base ranged attack bonus.

Divine Recall: Erivatius has superhuman memory of the circumstances of deaths and remembers every death that has ever occurred.

Irresistible Blows: Erivatius' unarmed strikes are made as melee touch attacks. If he hits, the creature struck must make a DC 22 Fortitude save or be stunned for 1d10 rounds. When he strikes an object, he ignores its hardness.

Life Drain: As a free action, Erivatius can generate a cloud of darkness that rises from his body in a spread with a radius of 30 feet and 10 feet high. The cloud blocks sight as *deeper darkness* but cannot be countered by Light spells. Living creatures within the cloud must make a DC 23 Will save or die. Even with a successful save, a victim gains two negative levels (DC 23 Fortitude save required to later remove these negative levels). A single creature can only be drained by the cloud once per day.

Domain Powers: Erivatius can use the domain powers for Death, Law, and Knowledge a number of times per day equal to his divine rank (if the power normally can be used more often than that, he gets the greater number of uses). His effective cleric level with these powers is 20.

Spell-Like Abilities: Erivatius can use any domain spell he can grant as a spell-like ability at will. His caster level is 10 + his divine rank.

At will—*animate dead, calm emotions* (DC 21), *cause fear* (DC 20), *clairaudience/clairvoyance, create greater undead, create undead, death knell* (DC 21), *death ward, destruction* (DC 26), *detect secret doors, detect thoughts* (DC 21), *dictum, discern location, dispel chaos, divination, find the path, foresight, hold monster* (DC 24), *legend lore, magic circle against chaos, order's wrath* (DC 23), *protection from chaos, shield of law, slay living* (DC 24), *summon monster IX* (not functional in the timevoid), *true seeing, wail of the banshee* (DC 28).

Cleric Spells (caster level 10; 6/7/7/5/5/4): Erivatius can spontaneously cast any cleric spell he can grant, and need not prepare his cleric spells beforehand as a result.

Other Divine Powers

Note that Erivatius has other divine powers, such as the ability to create magic items associated with his domains, but these abilities can not directly impact this adventure. Full details on standard divine powers can be found in *Deities & Demigods.*

Communication: Erivatius can understand, speak, and read any language, and can speak directly to any creature within one mile of himself per divine rank. As a standard action, he can send a communication to anyone within the Quicksilver Hourglass. This can be a conversation, an omen, a dream, or some form of visible phenomenon.

Draining Divinity (Ex): Each day, the Quicksilver Hourglass drains Erivatius of his divinity. Starting on day two of this adventure, his divine rank is lowered by one. Each succeeding day, his rank is lowered by one more point. On day six, he is at divine rank 0, and on day seven he is completely absorbed into the Hourglass and cannot be forced to manifest with the *tablet of judgment.*

The stats above present Erivatius at divine rank 5. His abilities decrease as his divine rank is drained, as outlined below.

- Armor Class reduced by 2 points per point of Divine Rank lost.
- Attack rolls, saving throws, skill checks, ability checks, caster level checks, and turning checks reduced by 1 point per point of Divine Rank lost.
- Fire resistance and spell resistance reduced by 1 per point of Divine Rank lost.
- The save DC for his Divine Aura is reduced by 1 per point of Divine Rank lost.
- At Divine Rank 4, he loses his Irresistible Blows salient divine ability. The save DC for his Life Drain salient divine ability is reduced by 1.
- At Divine Rank 3, he loses his Life Drain salient divine ability.
- At Divine Rank 2, he loses his Divine Blast salient divine ability.
- At Divine Rank 1, he loses his Divine Monk salient divine ability.
- At Divine Rank 0, Erivatius now misses on attack roll and saving throw results of a natural 1. He loses immunity to electricity, cold, acid, disease, poison, stunning, sleep, paralysis, death effects, and disintegration. His damage reduction is reduced to 10/epic. He loses his Divine Recall salient divine ability. He is now subject to death from massive damage. He loses his divine senses special quality, and now has normal mortal senses. He loses his divine aura. He loses the ability to spontaneously cast cleric spells. He loses his communication and travel powers as well.

Divine Aura (Ex): Erivatius' mere presence deeply affects mortals. His divine aura is a mind-affecting emanation with a radius of 30 ft. A DC 23 Will save resists the effects of his aura. Any mortal that successfully saves is immune to the power of his aura for one day. Once affected by an aura power, creatures remain affected as long

as they remain within the aura's radius. He can make his worshipers or lawful evil targets immune to his aura as a free action. Erivatius can choose from the following aura effects each round as a free action:

Daze: Affected beings just stare at Erivatius in fascination. They can defend themselves but can take no actions.

Fright: Affected beings become shaken and suffer a –2 morale penalty on attack rolls, saves, and checks. The merest glance or gesture from him makes them frightened, and they flee as quickly as they can, although they can choose the path of their flight.

Resolve: Allies of Erivatius receive a +4 morale bonus on attack rolls, saves, and checks, while his foes receive a –4 morale penalty on attack rolls, saves, and checks.

Divine Senses: Erivatius' senses extend to a range of one mile per divine rank. Once per week, as a standard action he can perceive everything within the Quicksilver Hourglass for up to one hour.

Immortality: Erivatius cannot die from natural causes. He does not age, need to eat, sleep, or breathe. He is not subject to death from massive damage.

Travel: Erivatius can use *greater teleport* at will, at caster level 20th except that he can transport only himself and up to 100 pounds of objects per divine rank. Of course, this ability does not function in the Quicksilver Hourglass due to the timevoid's separation from the Astral Plane.

Anson Caralya doesn't care how over-used it is; he still wishes he had been allowed to use the half-dragon template in "Quicksilver Hourglass." This is his first adventure to be published in DUNGEON.

SCALING THE ADVENTURE

"Quicksilver Hourglass" is designed for four 30th-level characters, but it can be modified for epic-level parties of different levels by adjusting the levels of all classed NPCs on a one-for-one basis with party level. You should also make the following adjustments:

- Adjust the number of crawling heads (Portal Cavern) and glooms (encounter area M1) on a one-for-one basis with the party level.
- Adjust the advancement of the maruts and blackstone gigant by 4 HD for each level of the party above or below 30th.
- Adjust Voursuol by one virtual age category (3 HD) for every 2 levels of the party above or below 30th level.
- Adjust Erivatius by one divine rank for every 3 levels of the party above or below 30th level. Alternately, adjust his cleric level by five (to a maximum of 20th level) in place of a single divine rank change.

Non-Epic characters: For a 20th-level party, adjust the adventure's encounters as follows:

- Remove the sickstone from the Portal Cavern. Remove the sphere of ruined bodies from the Nexus Tetrahedron.
- Reduce Baucojin and the monks of Erivatius by 10 levels.
- Reduce Huersefful to a sorcerer 15/archmage 2, Ivirere to a fighter 12/duelist 7, and Beshejaer to a cleric 18.
- Replace the advanced barbed devils with horned devils, the advanced blackstone gigant with a greater stone golem, and the advanced maruts with standard maruts.
- Make Voursuol a half-fiend very old black dragon.
- Make Erivatius a barbed devil monk 20.
- Other suggested changes for the other powerful monsters are listed below:

Epic monster	Replace with
Crawling head	Fiendish troll barbarian 5
Gloom	Human wererat monk 13
Shoolian	Human wererat rogue 4/fighter 4/duelist 10
Uvuudaum	26-HD bebelith demon
Phane	Ghost half-fiend stone giant sorcerer 10

Don't forget to modify treasure and NPC gear appropriately!

Mt.Zogon
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WHAT'S AN EXPLOSION DOG ?
ARF
SQUEEE!! ARF
OH, IT'S A WEIRD DOG THAT KILLS THINGS BY EXPLODING ITSELF - BLAM! THEN ITS SPLATTERED CHUNKS SQUIRM BACK TOGETHER, LIKE A TROLL! AND THEN IT LAPS-UP THE BLOOD OF ITS VICTIM!
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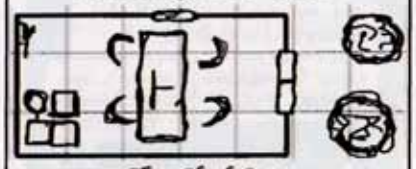

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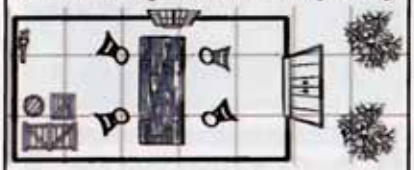

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Dungeon Master's Guide II

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5

A follow-up to the Dungeon Master's Guide, this book builds upon existing materials in the Dungeon Master's Guide, and is specifically designed to facilitate play, especially when the Dungeon Master has a limited amount of preparation time.

Chapters include discussion on running a game, designing adventures, building and using prestige classes, and creating campaign settings. Ready-made game elements include instant traps, pre-generated locations, treasures, and a fully realized and rendered town.

Sandstorm

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: Dungeons & Dragons

This beautifully illustrated supplement continues a series of releases that focus on how the environment can affect D&Dgameplay in every capacity. *Sandstorm* contains rules on how to adapt to hazardous hot and arid weather conditions, such as navigating desert terrain and surviving in fierce heat or harsh weather. There are expanded rules for environmental hazards and manipulation of hot weather elements, as well as new spells, feats, magic items, and prestige classes. New monsters associated with deserts and wastelands are included, as well as variants on current monsters. *Sandstorm* provides enough adventure material included for months of gameplay.

Lords of Madness: The Book of Aberrations

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: Dungeons & Dragons

The Book of Aberrations takes a comprehensive look at the most bizarre monsters of the D&D world and the heroes who fight them. It provides detailed information about beholders, mind flayers, aboleths, and other popular aberrations, while also introducing several new aberrations. In addition, this book provides new rules, feats, tactics, spells, and equipment for characters that hunt aberrations. Extensive story and campaign elements add interest and dimension to playing or fighting creatures of this type. The book features a prestige format, with heavy use of art throughout and a full-painted cover.

Races of Eberron

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5

Dauntless adventurers arise from among the spirited races of the warforged, shifters, changelings, and kalashtar. These bold explorers hurl themselves into the most dangerous quests with an unquenchable thirst for fortune and glory.

This supplement for the D&D game provides detailed information on the psychology, society, culture, behavior, religion, folklore, and other aspects of the races originally presented in the Eberron Campaign Setting. In addition, *Races of Eberron* also provides new substitution levels, prestige classes, feats, spells, magic items, equipment, and other options for creating exciting characters ready to explore any campaign world.

Eberron: Five Nations

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: Dungeons and Dragons 3.5

Five Nations offers players a rich source of information about playing and dealing with characters from the Five Nations of the Eberron world. The individual nation chapters include information on culture, geography (including maps), guilds and factions, new prestige classes, equipment, creatures, spells, magic items, and adventure sites.

d20 Past

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: d20

This new rules supplement provides everything players and gamemasters need to participate in adventures in the time period between the Renaissance and World War II, including new character options and rules for early modern firearms. It begins with an exploration of the historical period between 1450 and 1950, and then provides rules for creating characters and campaigns that blend realism and fantasy. *d20 Past* also presents alternative campaign models, along with all the rules needed to play swashbuckling pirate adventures, Victorian horror investigations, thrilling Pulp Era escapades, and more—including three ready-to-play campaign modules.

d20 Apocalypse

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast
Game System: d20

This new rules supplement provides everything players and Gamemasters need to participate in adventures in a post-apocalyptic setting—including rules and designs for apocalyptic events such as nuclear war, environmental disaster, alien invasion, or Armageddon. The book provides new rules for barter, scavenging, equipment, mutations and robots. Three ready-to-play campaign models are included.

DragonLance Holy Order of the Stars

Publisher: Sovereign Press
Game System: d20

The gods of Krynn can be seen by mortals by simply gazing up at their constellations wheeling in the night sky. The presence of the gods, or their absence, is an important story point in the long history of the world of Krynn. Up until now, only the basic details of the gods and their religion have been revealed. The *Holy Orders of the Stars* sourcebook gives more detail on the agendas, powers, temples, shrines, and worshippers of the Krynn's pantheon.

This sourcebook details the religions of Krynn, including extensive write-ups on all of the gods including lesser beings (such as Bast) that are found in novels but are not strictly deities of Krynn. New prestige classes, spells, magical items, and holy artifacts are described within.

DragonLance Spectre of Sorrows

Publisher: Sovereign Press
Game System: d20

Continuing the story begun in Key of Destiny, *Spectre of Sorrows* is a Dragonlance adventure set in the Age of Mortals after the War of Souls. The villains of the story are revealed and some questions are answered, even as the greater mystery deepens and a new threat to all of Krynn is exposed! *Spectre of Sorrows* can be played as part of the overall Age of Mortals campaign or used by itself. It is written by Christopher Coyle using a story created with author Margaret Weis and includes new spells, magical items, and creatures!

Tekumel Empire of the Petal Throne Hardcover RPG

Publisher: Guardians of Order
Game System: Tri-Stat

Tekumel is the oldest licensed property in the adventure gaming industry, first published by TSR in 1975. Barker has devoted over fifty years to creating the Tekumel universe, developing it into a vivid science fantasy setting with rich backgrounds and unique cultural identities. The core rulebook will introduce players to the land, history, and inhabitants of Tekumel, and give the GM the tools needed to develop and run epic campaigns or single adventures. Tekumel is part of the popular Tri-Stat Compatible game line, which features easy-to-learn game mechanics, quick combat action, and an extensive player network.

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Dreaming Cities Urban Fantasy RPG

Publisher: Guardians of Order
Game System: Tri-Stat

Introducing the ultimate urban fantasy genre and setting book featuring the popular Tri-Stat System. Ancient gods and modern myths rub shoulders in nightclubs, ghosts and goblins ride the subway, and the fairies are ready to rock and roll! This hardcover book features complete rules for playing and game mastering urban fantasy games, an informative guide to the genre, and three original settings that range in scope from the darkly comedic lives of the wee folk, to the magical rhymes and fables of our childhood, to the epic conflict between gothic Earth and the World of Nightmares. An excellent resource for players and an essential guide for Game Masters.

Monster Encyclopaedia II - The Dark Bestiary

Publisher: Mongoose Publishing
Game System: d20

Since their inception as an element of fantasy gaming, monsters have become little more than an obstacle for heroes to overcome. Even those well-thought out monsters with a complex background, story and motivation are, when all is said and done, put there to be defeated, so the player characters get their experience and return home a few levels richer. *Monster Encyclopaedia II: The Dark Bestiary* is the second in this new series designed to put the challenge back into the monsters you meet. Everything in the 256-page *Dark Bestiary* is evil, so don't go in expecting to find anything nice and furry that you can take home to show your family!

Jeremiah RPG Hardcover

Publisher: Mongoose Publishing
Game System: OGL

From the award-winning pen of J. Michael Straczynski comes Jeremiah, a dark tale of life and survival in a terrifying postapocalyptic nightmare. Utilising the Open Gaming License, this exciting roleplaying game details the characters and rich background of the critically acclaimed television series. The *Jeremiah Roleplaying Game* includes all the rules and other information needed to play in this gritty world.

Conan Aquilonia Hardcover

Publisher: Mongoose Publishing
Game System: OGL

Aquilonia - The political situation is rife with intrigue, murder and horror, and could easily be the setting for untold campaigns. From the palatial splendor of the capital, Tarantia, to the rural tranquility of the Tauran and the brooding nobles of Poitain, this 200-page sourcebook for Conan the Roleplaying Game details Hyboria's greatest kingdom, Aquilonia, the Flower of the West, destined to be ruled over by the mighty Conan himself! Just because some Nemedian scribe hyped up Conan to be the greatest hero of the age, don't let that stop your players from being greater. Let the Hyborian Age live and never let it stagnate. We are the kings of the world tonight!

Maze of the Minotaur

Publisher: Behemoth3
Game System: d20

The second book in the Masters and Minions series focuses on the Minotaur, its ecology, society, and rules for playing as monster characters. Play the diabolical bull lord or the cunning maze mage. Includes full stats for 4 new monsters, NPCs for each creature with detailed background and adventure hooks, and more generic NPCs of each race charted for levels 1-20. Purchase of the book entitles you to free related downloads including a massively hyperlinked PDF version that you can cut and paste and instantly link to related rules.

Iron Kingdom Full Metal Fantasy World Guide Hardcover

Publisher: Privateer Press
Game System: d20

The Iron Kingdoms World Guide covers all of the necessary information needed to flesh out the campaign world of western Immoren. Learn about the various kingdoms of Cygnar, Cryx, Ios, Khador, Llael, Ord, the Protectorate of Menoth, and Rhul, with entries for every city on the map. Find out who the movers and shakers are with hundreds of NPC listings, and explore Immoren's history, commerce, industries, politics, and other essentials. This staggering new age embodies the expression: "Full Metal Fantasy!" Get this guide if you want to investigate the far reaches and go nearly anywhere on the map in your Iron Kingdoms campaign.

Monte Cook's Arcana Evolved

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: OGL

When the long absent dragons return to wrest from the giants the lands they once ruled, Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed takes a huge leap forward—to an entirely new edition and title. This new variant player's handbook from 3rd Edition co-designer Monte Cook takes everything that tens of thousands loved about Arcana Unearthed, presents it in a deluxe full-color format, then adds a vast amount of all-new material! This book integrates and revises the contents of Monte Cook's Arcana Unearthed, The Diamond Throne, and Arcana Unearthed Screen and Player's Guide. Discover new PC races like the dragonlike Dracha, classes like the ritual warrior, evolved versions of all races, new champion and totem warrior types, and dozens of new spells, spell templates, feats, manifestations, equipment, and more.

EverQuest II RPG: Spell Guide

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: OGL

Eighteen character classes in EverQuest II Player's Guide have distinct magic traditions and powers. There are so many spells and powers that they require their own volume. Presented for use especially with the EQII RPG—but fully 100% compatible with Open Gaming material—are the 1000+ spells of this book! Hardcover.

Bloodlines: The Hidden

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: Storyteller System

Bloodlines: The Hidden is the first in a new Vampire series that focuses on the refinements and abuses of undead blood. Drawn from the shadows are 12 bloodlines from all five clans, lineages that diverge from the clans and that have dedicated the ages to keeping their existence secret, or to lurking on the edges of discovery, devising their own inscrutable machinations. And now you can play them. Hardcover.

Werewolf: The Forsaken

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: Storytelling System

Werewolf: The Forsaken—the game of bestial violence and supernatural terror—is the second core setting sourcebook intended for use with White Wolf's new Storytelling System. Werewolves are creatures of original sin, tainted by ancestral crimes and driven to hunt by the shame of being abandoned. This book details what it is to be Forsaken, one of the Tribes of the Moon. Create your own werewolf pack and seek redemption or give in to your savage nature. Hardcover. For use with the World of Darkness Rulebook.

Hunting Ground: The Rockies

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: Storytelling System

Hunting Ground: The Rockies details the Colorado Rocky Mountains as a setting for Werewolf: The Forsaken. This book comes complete with characters, background information and huge numbers of plot hooks, as well as a long look at the spiritscape of the region. Play through the sample story provided, or any of hundreds more possible. Make this land your own. Hardcover.

Mind's Eye Theatre (Core Rulebook)

Publisher: White Wolf
Game System: Storytelling System

Mind's Eye Theatre gives you everything players and Storytellers need to play a live-action game set in the World of Darkness. From setting material and rules for playing mortal characters to Storytelling advice and an innovative challenge resolution system, this book is the cornerstone of a totally new live-action experience. Enter the theatre of the mind and learn the secrets of the night. Trade-sized and hardcover.

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Spycraft CCG Day of the Bullet

Publisher: AEG
Booster Display (48 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (11 Cards)
Starter Display (8 Decks)
Starter Deck: (60 Cards)

Set Size: Approx 160 cards. 84 card decks (four different factions). March 20 is a momentous day, though the world at large is unaware of its importance. Each year on this day, a discreet package is delivered to an as-yet-unidentified assassin—a package containing one signature bullet and one name. By dawn on March 21, the person named in the package is dead. In the intelligence world, March 20 is known as the Day of the Bullet, and this mysterious contractor is referred to only as "The Triggerman." No one knows the Triggerman's origins or motives until now. Join the race to learn the truth behind the Triggerman, and his mysterious intentions for the global scene. The truth will shatter all deception, shred all duplicity, and lay bare one of the most fearsome secrets in the Spycraft CCG history!

Teen Titans CCG

Publisher: Bandai
Booster Display (24 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (9 Cards)
Starter Display (6 Decks)
Starter Deck: (60 Cards)

Fighting for truth, justice, and the last slice of pizza! The Teen Titans—Robin, Cyborg, Starfire, Beast Boy, and Raven—have dedicated their lives to fighting evil in all its forms. But their enemies are many, and all chaos has broken loose. In the *Teen Titans Trading Card Game*, a mysterious force has taken over the cosmos, upsetting the world's natural balance. In the confusion, villains sometimes fight villains, and Titans fight Titans! Each player must take control of a team of fighters in order to return peace and balance to the shattered universe! Each 2-Player Starter Set comes with 60 Cards, a two-sided playmat, and complete instructions. They are offered in 6-count displays. Supplement your decks with 9-card boosters packed in 24-count displays.

Lord of the Rings CCG Black Rider

Publisher: Decipher
Booster Display (36 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (11 Cards)
Starter Display (12 Decks)
Starter Deck: (63 Cards)

"The Nine are abroad again..." What began in Shadows is expanded and enhanced in the next War of the Ring block expansion: *Black Rider*. The set features essential reprints from the Fellowship block, enhanced strategies using the Muster, Lurker, Toil, and Resistance keywords, and a host of new companions and minions to invigorate and intensify gameplay. Two different playable 63-card starter decks (60 fixed cards plus 3 random rares) feature starter-only versions of Saruman and The Mouth of Sauron. The 11-card booster packs contain 1 rare, 3 uncommon, and 7 common cards. A Legends or Legends Masterworks foil replaces a rare card in approximately one in seven booster packs.

Star Trek CCG Strange New Worlds

Publisher: Decipher
Booster Display (30 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (11 Cards)

The Ferengi arrive to Second Edition! With this long-awaited and often troublesome affiliation come many new options and strategies that will enliven gameplay and excite collectors.

Strange New Worlds offers up an entirely new sub-strategy utilizing androids and hologram personnel plus the classic gameplay players have come to expect from Star Trek CCG Second Edition. New "Archive" inserts will entice both the collector and player in you

The 11-card booster packs contain 1 rare, 3 uncommon, and 7 common cards. A foil from the 18-card "Archive" foil subset replaces a rare card in approximately one in eight boosters (1:8). A foil from the 2-card "Archive Portraits" foil subset replaces a rare in approximately one in 70 booster packs (1:70).

Call of Cthulhu CCG Forbidden Relics

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games
Booster Display (36 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (11 Cards)

Fantasy Flight Games is proud to announce the second expansion for the Call of Cthulhu CCG, *Forbidden Relics*. Powerful forces gather, each vying for artifacts that will either empower or defeat the Mythos. With over 140 new cards, *Forbidden Relics* promises new and exciting mechanics with an unprecedented power level!

A Game of Thrones CCG Valyrian Edition Premium Starter

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games

Valyrian Edition Premium Starters provide a great starting point for up to two players in the Game of Thrones CCG. This starter set includes two decks, 10 brand new cards and reprints of some powerful rare cards from past sets. Players new and old alike will not want to miss this chance!

Inuyasha Jaki

Publisher: Score Entertainment
Booster Display (12 packs)
Booster Pack: (10 cards)

The Inuyasha TCG gets its Second expansion series—*Jaki*! In this Trading Card Game players build decks from a pool of cards and play them against each other to reach victory! The Rules come in each booster! Inuyasha TCG plays directly out of booster packs.

Anachronism: Norse/Japanese Beowulf/Mushashi Starter

Publisher: TriKing Games

Miyamoto Mushashi, the world's greatest samurai, versus Beowulf, the Norse King—who would win if they could face each other in arena combat? Introducing *Anachronism*, The Greatest Game in History, that lets you pit historic warriors against one another, using their unique skills, armaments and inspirations. Who is the greatest warrior of them all? Play this fast-paced collectible card game brought to you by The History Channel and TriKing Games to find out. The Starter Game includes: play mat, dice, instructions and 2 historic warriors—Beowulf and Miyamoto Mushashi—everything you need start to play *Anachronism*. Once you've mastered game play, collect additional warrior packs and challenge others to a match in the combat arena. You can even mix warrior characteristics, armaments and inspirations to create the greatest warrior of all time!

Shaman King Reincarnation

Booster Display (24 Packs)
Booster Pack: (10 Cards)
Starter Display (6 Decks)
Starter Deck (63 Cards)

The Spirits are restless; they call for you. The Shaman tournament has come, are you ready to join the fight for the title of Shaman King? Engage in one-on-one combat with Yoh, Amidamaru, and all the characters of Shaman King as you play the amazing new card game that challenges you to master the spirit world and become the Shaman King!

DC TCG: Green Lantern Corp Booster Display

Publisher: Upper Deck
Booster Display (24 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (14 Cards)

For millennia, the forces of evil have feared the Green Lantern Corps. The Guardians of the Universe have tasked the Corps to bring Order to a chaotic galaxy, and they fulfill their mission with unwavering loyalty and willpower. Wielding the most potent weapons ever devised, the Green Lantern Corps fills the darkest corners of the universe with the light of justice. Build your deck around the valiant members of the Green Lantern Corps or the sinister forces of the Anti-Matter Universe. Destroy humanity with the Manhunters or bring the galaxy to its knees with the Emerald Enemies. The fate of the universe is in your hands!

Yu-Gi-Oh! Dark Revelation Booster

Publisher: Upper Deck
Booster Display: (24 Boosters)
Booster Pack: (9 Cards)

Each *Yu Gi Oh! Dark Revelations* Booster Box contains 9 cards per pack. *Dark Revelation* is a reprint set designed to help Duelists collect hard-to-get and out-of-print cards. Perfect for Duelists entering the world of Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game and includes cards with improved clarified text. *Dark Revelation* also contains cards for expert Duelists with "extensive" knowledge of the game. Included in each pack is a Player Tip card that will help Duelists expand their Yu- Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game knowledge. An all-around solid product that will surely be another star addition to the Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game series.

BOARD GAMES

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Ticket to Ride Europe

Publisher: Days of Wonder

Players take a train ride to the great cities of turn-of-the-century Europe. More than just a new map, *Ticket to Ride Europe* features brand new game play elements including Tunnels, Ferries, and Train Stations, plus they've upgraded you to First-Class accommodations with larger cards, new Train Station game pieces, and a lavishly illustrated game board.

Reiner Knizia's Ingenious

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games

That's ingenious! *Ingenious* is the new abstract placement game from internationally-renowned game designer, Reiner Knizia. Players place colored tiles on the hexagonal board, scoring points, blocking opponents' tile placement, and trying to protect themselves from being blocked by their opponents. Marvelously elegant and compulsively replayable, *Ingenious* is an excellent introduction to German-style abstract board games. It's ingeniously simple, and simply ingenious! *Ingenious* is suitable for up to four players, as well as for solo play.

Arkham Horror

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games

The town of Arkham, Massachusetts is in a panic. Horrific and bizarre events have begun to occur with increasing frequency—all seeming to point toward some cataclysmic event in the near future. Only one small band of investigators can save Arkham from the Great Old Ones and destruction! Arkham Horror was originally published by Chaosium, Inc. almost two decades ago. This new, updated edition features stunning new artwork and graphical design as well as revised and expanded rules from the game's original creator, Richard Launius! No fan of the Cthulhu mythos will want to miss this opportunity to acquire this classic Call of Cthulhu board game!

Runebound: Island of Dread

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games

Explore the uncharted islands of the world of Runebound and piece together the lost map to the fabled Island of Dread! *Island of Dread* features a gorgeous new board overlay that creates a completely new game environment. The expansion set also features 126 new cards, including new characters, encounters, challenges, events and equipment, as well as new rules for ships that characters can hire to transport them among the scattered islands of the dangerous seas in their quest to find the Island of Dread and win the game.

Island of Dread is an expansion for Runebound, the fantasy adventure board game. You need to own the Runebound basic game to play.

Bone Appetite

Publisher: Mayfair Games

You and your friends have been invited to dine with the giant in his residence. It seems that he has planned a party for all the clans of the woods. Every monster who is any monster will be there—The Witches, The Dryads, the Orcs, Trolls, the Vegheads, and the Goblins. Unfortunately, the giant has decided to place his guests upon the menu. See if you and your kind can survive till the giant is full.

2-6 players, Ages 8+ Playing time 20-30 minutes.

Star Wars Risk Clone Wars Edition

Publisher: Milton Bradley

A year has passed since the start of the Clone Wars on Geonosis. The Galactic Republic has since become engulfed in all-out warfare against the Confederacy of Independent Systems. The effects of this galaxy-wide struggle have been felt in every facet of the Republic. Take command of the Republic "Clone Trooper" Army or lead the Separatists in their universal conquest to topple the Old Republic as players wage war on numerous planetary battlegrounds in the galaxy's most unforgettable conflict in this exciting RISK variant.

Kitty Chaos

Publisher: Playroom Entertainment

The "Cat"-astophic Game of Quick Escapes! Run Kitty Run! In *Kitty Chaos*, four kittens have made a daring escape from the clutches of the evil City Pound, which snatches the felines from their owners and sells them to the fatal fur trade. Now they must make their way back through the suburban streets to their loving owners. Unfortunately, their trek is troubled with danger; from vicious dogs to malicious kids, these furry felines have a chaotic adventure in front of them, as the pound van doesn't give up its chase along the way. Your job is to get your kitty back to its correct owner. Luckily, you have nine lives to help you get there—so be the first player to reach your owner's home and win the game! For 2-4 Players, Ages 10 to Adult. Contents: 87 Playing Cards, Game board, 4 Cat pawns, 1 Pound Van pawn, 40 Life Tokens, 6-sided die and Instructions in English, Spanish, French & German.

Shadow of the Emperor

Publisher: Rio Grande Games

Germany in the late middle ages! It is a time of flourishing cities, influential bishops, the powerful popes, and a pompous aristocracy. In such a volatile climate, no dynasty can remain in power for long. Several aristocratic families seek to acquire the crown of the emperor. But this decision lies in the hands of the seven electors. 24 emperor candidates use their knights and cities, marry their barons, and work to influence the electors. But all efforts are useless if the candidate is not elected. Ralf Burkert 2 - 4 players, ages 12+ Playing time: 90 minutes.

SPANC (Space Pirate Amazon Ninja Catgirls)

Publisher: Steve Jackson Games

SPANC Them All! Life is good when you're a Space Pirate Amazon Ninja Catgirl. Enjoy a life of larceny and mayhem as you embark on one Caper after another. Defeat every challenge the galaxy throws at you, from the Friendly Guard Puppies all the way to the Fiendish Death Trap. Pick up Toys (and the occasional Poolboy), grab more Fame than anyone else, and watch your tail . . . because the other catgirls want what you've got! Lovingly illustrated by Phil Foglio, SPANC is a fast-paced card game of space pirates, amazons, ninja, and catgirls. All at once. 108 full-color oversized cards, counters, rulesheet, and dice in a 6" x 9" box.

Saboteur

Publisher: Z-Man Games

You are dwarves digging for gold in the depths of a mine when suddenly the pick-axe breaks and the lantern goes out. The saboteur has struck again! But who is the saboteur, and will he (or they!) stop you from reaching the treasure? If you succeed, gold awaits you. If you don't, then the spoils go to the victor. Whoever has the most gold nuggets after three rounds is the winner. A 3-10 player path-laying card game where each player has a role and no one knows for sure what that role that is. Playing time: 30 minutes.

Santiago

Publisher: Z-man Games

The water flows where the money does! Some kilometers west of the African mainland lies the Cape Verde Island of Santiago. The climate is hot, and every drop of water is precious. Every player buys at auction certain plantations (potatoes, beans, paprika, bananas, and sugar cane) and tries to connect these to others in order to unite and enlarge their holdings. Plantations must quickly be connected to the canal irrigation system so that they do not dry up completely and fail to produce any yield. Bribes to the Canal Overseer are necessary, in order to insure that the canal system connects to your own plantations. The sooner that a plantation is irrigated and connected to other plantations of the same type, the more yield and thus the more money that will be gained at the end of the game. The one who wins will be the one who most skillfully acquires plantations, irrigates them, and connects them to lucrative plantations of the same type. A 3-5 player game of negotiation, bidding, tile-laying, and much player interaction. Playing time: 1 hour. Components: 1 Game board, 110 wooden yield markers, 45 plantation tiles, 20 wooden canals, 150 Bank notes, 1 Canal Overseer, 3 plastic palm trees, 1 wooden well marker, and an 8-page color rulebook.

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DICE

No gamer's arsenal would be complete without dice. We all have them—stored in glass jars, leather bags, and even simply in our own pockets. You'll find just about every size, shape, and color of dice imaginable at paizo.com from the leading manufacturers in our industry. Here is just a sample of what we carry. Drop by and find the dice you need!

Pound of Dice (assorted)
Manufacturer: Chessex

Astrological Dice Game
Manufacturer: Chessex

7 Cube Speckled (orange)
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

Jumbo Dice Set: Opaque Blue (7pc)
Manufacturer: Koplow

Dark Green Glass Stones (Approx 40)
Manufacturer: Chessex

Pearlescent Purple/White Cheat Dice
Publisher: Chessex

7 Cube Satin (orange)
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

Tri Opaque D30 Black/White Die
Manufacturer: Koplow

Blue Velour Dice Pouch (large)
Manufacturer: Chessex

Giant d20 (brushed steel)
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

Dragon Bones Dice Set Ltd Edition
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

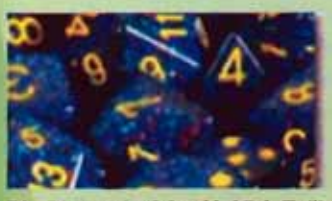
25mm Double Die
Manufacturer: Koplow

Translucent: Poly Yellow w/ White (7)
Manufacturer: Chessex

7 Cube Crystal Oblivion (blue)
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

LG 5mm Transparent Assorted Dice Tube (30)
Manufacturer: Koplow

Glitter Poly Assorted 7 Set (HT)
Manufacturer: Koplow



Dice Menagerie #3 Speckled Poly Twilight (7)
Manufacturer: Chessex

7 Cube Speckled (green)
Manufacturer: Crystal Caste

Dice Bones (18mm)
Manufacturer: Koplow

Red Place Value Dice Set (4)
Manufacturer: Koplow

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TWISTS AND TURNS

DESIGNING THE CAMPAIGN AROUND THE CHARACTERS (PART 3)

BY MONTE COOK
BY KYLE HUNTER

If you assume that in the movie *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker is the Player Character, you see that the "campaign" really isn't centered around him. He's at the center of the story, of course, and some of it even ties into his backstory, but truthfully, he was just a guy in the right place at the right time. In *The Empire Strikes Back*, however, we see things change. Now the "campaign" is based specifically around him, with Darth Vader being his father and specifically looking to turn him to the dark side.

Both are fine films and either approach would make for a wonderful roleplaying campaign. In this Dungeoncraft installment, however, I thought I'd address *The Empire Strikes Back* style of campaign design. In other words, a campaign designed (at least in part), around the PCs.

A CHARACTER-CENTRIC CAMPAIGN

There's nothing wrong with having a campaign where the characters don't matter. Now, that may sound cold and heartless, but it's true. You can design a campaign where the PCs might be a dwarf fighter, an elf wizard and three human rogues, but it would be essentially no different than if the PCs were a half-orc fighter, a human wizard, a human cleric, and a halfling rogue. The encounters might go differently, but the plotlines you set up, the opponents you create, and the environments you design all remain the same. And that's fine.

However, you can also design a campaign fundamentally altered by who the PCs are, or even one that only works with very specific characters involved. For example, you could create a campaign centered around the drow as villains where the PCs are drow-hating elves or those of other races who have been personally harmed by the drow in the past. Or, the PCs might represent the fulfillment of some ancient prophecy. One PC might be the long-lost heir to the throne. The PCs could even all be the results of a magical experiment gone awry. The village threatened by the oncoming hobgoblin army might be the very place one or more PC hails from. The PCs might all be wizards at a magical school at the heart of all the campaign's action.

The advantage to a character-centric campaign is that the players feel special, and frankly, it's fun to be special. The challenges they face are more immediate, and the dangers are heightened because they relate directly to the PCs. The characters aren't just outsiders seeking glory or gold, they're involved. If they fail, the consequences directly affect them. The campaign won't feel like every other run-of-the-mill game that the players have been in before—it will be its own, unique experience.

And while I refer to this as a character-centric *campaign*, the truth is that it's only some of the adventures that are centered around the characters, usually, and the adventures have different hooks involving different characters or different aspects of the same character. A wizard character might seek to enter a special magical organization, but in order to do so, the secret headquarters must be found and tests must be passed. Later, another character in the same group learns that her

adventurer father is missing and the PCs must track him down and rescue him from the trouble he's got himself into. Still later, the wizard character's old master contacts him to warn of a demon that secretly inhabits the staff he gave him when he was but an apprentice. After that, yet another character in the group falls in love but his impending nuptials might be ruined when an old foe shows up to enact revenge. Sprinkle in a few more straightforward adventures, and you've got a character-centric campaign.

The drawbacks to this approach, of course, are both serious and obvious. If one of the PCs is the secret heir to the throne, what happens if that PC dies? Or, taken a step further, with that PC being at the heart of the campaign's plotline, are the players ever going to really believe that he (or they) are ever in any real danger? Will their importance to the story take away any belief that they might fail? Special characters are too important to lose, right?

CHARACTER CAMPAIGNS VERSUS CAMPAIGN CHARACTERS

To make a campaign based around the PCs, the DM doesn't have to put the PCs at the heart of the setting. You can have a character-based campaign without having a campaign based around the characters. In other words, the PCs' "specialness" doesn't have to mean that they are kings, or lords of prophecy, or the saviors of the world. If one of the PCs is the son of a gambler with unpaid debts so that moneylenders and criminals are after the character to pay off his father's debts, the character is "special" in that some of the adventures surround this fact, but he really isn't all that special in terms of the entire setting. While it's fun to have characters that are important to the entire world they live in (so-called "campaign characters"), not every story is about such people, and the character-centric campaign could be designed around these smaller kinds of stories. Either way, the players will feel their characters are in the thick of the action, and that's the important thing.

As a side note, though, DMs should be aware that they can also make the PCs central figures in the campaign through events or actions, rather than heredity or destiny. For example, the DM might create a campaign in which the PCs have been entrusted with an ancient secret by a dying sage that leads them to undertake an important quest. Once the PCs have this secret, much of the campaign revolves directly around them—only they can go on the quest and only they possess the secret knowledge. Before they learned the secret, however, there was nothing intrinsically special about the characters.

PLAYER GOALS

Past installments of this column have discussed the idea of a player-driven campaign. In such a campaign, the players drive at least some of the action by creating goals for themselves rather than having quests or missions given to them by some outside force. This method of running a campaign meshes nicely with the idea of centering the campaign around the players. In fact, you really can't have a player-driven campaign without centering everything on the PCs.

You don't have to let the players sit in the driver's seat to utilize this idea, however. You can do it on a smaller scale.

Say one PC's goal is to own his own home. That's not enough to drive a campaign, but it is enough to wrap an adventure or two around. Earning the money needed to buy or build the home, discovering the home is haunted, defending the home from thieves—the possibilities are numerous.

The only trick here is to find out what the PCs' goals and desires are, so that as the DM you can give them the proper hooks to play off of. This can be as simple as just asking the players for a list of goals. Or, the goals might develop over the course of the game. After the PCs defend the forested vale against invading orcs and trolls, they decide they want to live there, setting themselves up as the kingdom's officially sanctioned (and hopefully supported) Defenders of the Vale.

Sometimes, player goals come out when a player designs his character's background. Sometimes, they are the very reason a PC is in the campaign. For example, a PC barbarian's background suggests that he has come to the civilized lands to track down the slavers that attacked his tribe and kidnapped some of his people. This is an interesting background, and it's also a potential adventure hook. Now the DM can design entire adventures around tracking down the slavers, rescuing slaves, and returning them to the tribe.

The Players Have to Play Along

For a character-centric campaign to really work, the players must realize that they need to give the DM material to work with. This isn't a chore, though—it's a freedom. When the players realize that they are free to have their character have a past, to have interests beyond the next dungeon, to have relationships with NPCs other than those out to kill him, it opens up an infinite number of possibilities. Characters can fall in love. They can go into business. They can join organizations. They can get involved in the community—perhaps even in politics. These things are fodder for the character-centric campaign and they lead to well-rounded and interesting characters that go far beyond a set of stats and gear.

Players need to provide the DM with interesting backstories and possible NPCs related to what they have done, what they are doing, and what they plan on doing in the future. They need to tell the DM their future goals and what their character would eventually like to strive for. They need to be willing to interact with NPCs and the world around them on a personal level. It's a responsibility, but it's also really fun and very rewarding.

Chicken or the Egg?

So, what should occur first: the players create their PCs for the campaign to be based around, or the DM creates his campaign and then requires the players to create characters within specific parameters?

The truth is, either is fine. There's nothing wrong with a DM mandating certain aspects of characters or their background to better fit them into the campaign. The DM could even go so far as to tell a player "your character is the son of a noble," or "your character's family was wiped out by sahuagin." Few players will rebel against those kinds of interesting hooks—most players *want* to fit into the setting and campaign you've developed. And of course, sometimes the players don't even have to know this kind of information beforehand. The fact that a character's mother was secretly an assassin that killed the grand wizard of the land can be a secret that is revealed only well into the campaign.

There's also a third option. The DM creates a basic outline for the campaign, the players create characters, and as the game progresses, the DM slowly wraps the campaign around the PCs.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A PC's mother is a powerful sorceress with powerful enemies. One character's sister is kidnapped and the PCs are required to perform a quest for her release. A PC's crazy old uncle dies and leaves the character his reputedly haunted manor home in his will. A PC with mysterious parentage turns out to be the child of outsider visitors who left her behind by mistake. These are all just some of the possible adventure hooks a DM can use to create an adventure or series of adventures around the relatives of one or more PCs.

The NPCs involved don't have to be blood relations. Friends, teachers, old military buddies, childhood acquaintances and former business partners all work too, as do any possibly related NPCs. The whole idea is that the adventure in question is made more immediate because there is a direct connection to the PCs. It's not just the local farmers who are plagued by the appearance of ankhegs, it's a friend or relative of the PCs.

The danger of this approach is overuse. You don't want the players to think of their friends and relatives only as potential hostages and victims for their enemies. You don't want every ally to be only a liability in the end.

CAUSES HAVE EFFECTS

Perhaps the most straightforwardly organic way to tailor the campaign around the PCs uses the "third option" mentioned in the Chicken or the Egg sidebar. The campaign goes fairly normally for a while, but something that the PCs do causes things to suddenly focus on them specifically.

When the PCs defeat the evil cult of the rat god, the surviving cultists hire mercenaries and assassins to slay the characters. When the PCs depose the evil tyrant, the formerly oppressed people of the land turn to them for leadership. When the PCs fail to stop the troll queen from stealing the *helm of alacrity*, the townsfolk take the characters' belongings and run them out of town.

If the comic book adage is, "with great power comes great responsibility," then the RPG corollary is, "with great deeds comes great attention." When the PCs act, whether it's as heroes, villains, or just gold-hungry mercenaries, they're going to become a part of things—part of the plot arc itself. It won't just be NPCs acting upon NPCs, but NPCs acting on PCs. NPCs will spy on them, attempt to outmaneuver or trick them, attempt to ally with them, attempt to bribe them, attempt to steal from or betray them, and even attempt to kill them.

EQUAL TIME

It's important to make sure as you plan on how to put the PCs at the center of things that you don't make it so that the campaign favors one PC over the other. While books and movies often have a star or central character and a number of supporting roles, that's not the way RPGs work. Every PC is the star, and the group works as a team. It's not fun for everyone else if one PC is the sole focus of the campaign.

So that means even if you decide that one character is destined to be the new queen (whether she knows about it or not), while the other characters are "just" adventurers, you can still also focus plots and scenarios on them, using different kinds of hooks. The important thing is that all the characters get the same amount of attention, even if it is for different reasons. One of the future queen's friends might have a sister who needs help protecting a caravan from wyvern-riding bandits, while another might need to return to his people in their underground city to find the murderers who slew his mentor.

In a way, think of your game as an episodic television show with an ensemble cast. One week, the episode focuses on one character, but the next, attention is drawn to another, and the week after that the entire cast acts together with equal emphasis.

In short, the whole idea behind the character-centric campaign is to put the spotlight on the PCs as much as possible and make them feel connected to the events of the campaign. Just remember to divide the spotlight time equally and ensure that all players feel equally connected.

Next Time: Managing the flow of information.

Monte Cook is the author of the Dungeon Master's Guide. *Check out his publishing company, Malhavoc Press, at montecook.com.*

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SAGES AND SCHOLARS

BY ALEC AUSTIN
BY KYLE HUNTER

Whenever a group of adventurers needs to know something they cannot easily find out, they usually ask a sage. Sages can analyze inscriptions, give lessons in monstrous anatomy, or research the history and powers of an artifact the PCs have liberated from a ruin. But though the aged wizard with a long beard is a genre staple, he is far from the only sort of scholar the PCs can encounter, as the following examples demonstrate.

THE ANATOMIST

Dorrin Half-axe is a student of nature in all its forms, especially those forms that squirm and wriggle and think of humanoids as food. Though he's not long on book learning, this dwarven ranger knows dozens of things about aberrations and other obscure monsters. His forest cabin is filled with trophies he's taken from defeated foes, which he uses to illustrate esoteric points about monstrous anatomy. While the squeamish might not appreciate being spattered with gore during the course of a demonstration, Dorrin believes the best way to learn about your enemy is to cut them open and see what makes them tick. This belief has earned him quite a few scars.

Dorrin Half-axe, male dwarf ranger 6: CR 6; Medium humanoid; HD 6d8+18; hp 48; Init +2; Spd 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 12, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +6; Grp +9; Atk +11 melee (1d10+4/x3, +1 *dwarven waraxe*); Full Atk +9/+4 melee (1d10+4/x3, +1 *dwarven waraxe*) and +8/+3 melee (1d6+2/x3, +1 *handaxe*); SA favored enemy (aberration +4, magical beast +2), spells; SQ darkvision 60 ft., dwarf traits, wild empathy +6; AL NG; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +6; Str 16, Dex 14, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 6.

Skills: Handle Animal +7, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +13, Knowledge (geography) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Listen +11, Spot +11, Survival +13.

Feats: Endurance[B], Improved Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Iron Will, Skill Focus (Knowledge [dungeoneering]), Track[B], Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Weapon Focus (dwarven waraxe).

Languages: Common, Dwarven, Undercommon.

Ranger Spells Prepared (caster level 3): 1st—*longstrider, pass without trace.*

Possessions: +1 *chain shirt*, +1 *dwarven waraxe*, +1 *handaxe.*

Slither, Medium viper animal companion: hp 18; *Monster Manual* 280.

THE SELF-TAUGHT APPRENTICE

Meliara Vellis was ecstatic when her elder brother Stephen, the local baron's court mage, agreed to take her on as an apprentice. She was somewhat less pleased when she discovered that Stephen couldn't explain to her how he cast spells. While Stephen's library was filled with arcane tomes, he hardly ever looked at them, and the more Meliara heard him talk about magic, the more it became clear that her brother wasn't a proper wizard, but a softheaded sorcerer.

Undeterred, Meliara availed herself of her brother's library, studying wizardry and gaining esoteric knowledge. She greets characters that are referred to Stephen's tower warmly, and tells them that her brother is quite busy and unlikely to answer their questions. Still, if they tell her what the problem is (and maybe slip her a little coin), she might be able to convince him to look into the matter.

As Meliara is far more knowledgeable than Stephen, she does all the actual research. The money she takes in goes to expand her brother's extensive library, which grants her a +5 circumstance bonus on all Knowledge checks.

If Meliara is threatened or injured, her brother is certain to exact retribution.

Meliara Vellis, female human wizard 7: CR 7; Medium humanoid; HD 7d4; hp 19; Init +1; Spd 30 ft; AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +3; Grp +2; Atk/Full Atk +2 melee (1d4/19–20, dagger); SA spells; SQ summon familiar; AL LN; SV Fort +2 Ref +3 Will +6; Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 19, Wis 13, Cha 14.

Skills: Concentration +10, Decipher Script +17, Knowledge (arcana) +17, Knowledge (history) +14, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +14, Knowledge (the planes) +17, Spellcraft +16.

Feats: Craft Wondrous Item[B], Magical Aptitude, Scribe Scroll[B], Skill Focus (Decipher Script), Skill Focus (Knowledge [arcana]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [the planes]).

Languages: Aquan, Common, Draconic, Ignan, Terran.

Wizard Spells Prepared (caster level 7): 0—*detect magic* (2), *message*, *read magic*; 1st—*comprehend languages*, *expeditious retreat*, *identify* (2), *unseen servant*; 2nd—*blindness/deafness* (DC 16), *detect thoughts* (DC 16), *fox's cunning*, *invisibility*; 3rd—*deep slumber* (DC 17), *dispel magic*, *suggestion* (DC 17); 4th—*dimension door*, *scrying* (DC 18).

Spellbook: 0—all, 1st—*comprehend languages*, *charm person*, *expeditious retreat*, *identify*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *unseen servant*; 2nd—*arcane lock*, *blindness/deafness*, *detect thoughts*, *fox's cunning*, *invisibility*, *knock*, *scorching ray*; 3rd—*deep slumber*, *dispel magic*, *explosive runes*, *fireball*, *suggestion*; 4th—*detect scrying*, *dimension door*, *scrying*.

Possessions: *Bracers of armor +3*, *pearl of power* (1st level), 3 *potions of cure light wounds*, *potion of shield of faith*, *ring of protection +1*.

Stephen Vellis, male human sorcerer 12: CR 12; Medium humanoid; HD 12d4+24; hp 55; Init +2; Spd 30 ft.; AC 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15; Base Atk +6; Grp +6; Atk +7 melee (1d6, masterwork shortspear); Full Atk +7/+2 melee (1d6, masterwork shortspear); SA spells; SQ summom familiar; AL CG; SV Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +14; Str 10, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 22.

Skills: Bluff +21, Concentration +17, Spellcraft +15.

Feats: Combat Casting, Force of Personality*, Greater Spell Focus (evocation), Greater Spell Penetration, Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Penetration.

*Force of Personality (from *Complete Adventurer*) allows Stephen to add his Charisma bonus instead of his Wisdom bonus to his Will saves.

Language: Common.

Sorcerer Spells Known (6/7/8/7/7/6/4; caster level 12; +8 ranged touch): 0—*acid splash*, *arcane mark*, *detect magic*, *disrupt undead*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*, *ray of frost*, *read magic*; 1st—*burning hands* (DC 19), *cause fear* (DC 17), *mage armor***, *magic missile*, *shield*; 2nd—*cat's grace*, *Melf's acid arrow*, *mirror image*, *scorching ray*, *web* (DC 18); 3rd—*dispel magic*, *fly*, *lightning bolt* (DC 21), *protection from energy*; 4th—*greater invisibility*, *phantasmal killer* (DC 20), *wall of fire*; 5th—*cone of cold* (DC 23), *teleport*; 6th—*chain lightning* (DC 24).

**Already cast.

Possessions: *Cloak of Charisma +4*, *metamagic rod (lesser empower)*, *ring of protection +1*.

THE ANCIENT HERMIT

Ranulf the Pedant has worshiped Boccob all his life, but after centuries as the head librarian at a major temple he grew tired of the incessant questions asked by fellow priests and worshipers. Distancing himself from the church's hierarchy, he has spent the last few decades as a hermit, living near a mountain village and pursuing his studies in solitude.

Ranulf is a treasure trove of information, but he is also antisocial and detests the ignorant. If characters visit him and ask for help, Ranulf tests them with questions that only students of the esoteric and obscure could possibly answer (DC 25 to DC 30 Knowledge checks). If a character impresses him by answering one of his questions correctly, Ranulf quizzes the PC on related points, growing more excited if the character continues to answer correctly or debates his conclusions in a convincing and intelligent manner. Though he would never admit it, Ranulf is lonely. He would be pleased to help anyone knowledgeable enough to pass his tests.

Ranulf the Pedant, male elf cleric 7/expert 6: CR 12; Medium humanoid; HD 7d8+18 plus 6d6+12; hp 72; Init +3; Spd 30 ft.; AC 21, touch 13, flat-footed 18; Base Atk +9; Grp +10; Atk +11 melee (1d8+2, +1 *morningstar*); Full Atk +11/+6 melee (1d8+2, +1 *morningstar*); SA spells, turn undead; SQ elf traits, low-light vision; AL N; SV Fort +11, Ref +10, Will +11; Str 12, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 20, Wis 18, Cha 13.

Skills: Concentration +12, Knowledge (arcana) +21, Knowledge (architecture and engineering) +10, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +10, Knowledge (geography) +24, Knowledge (history) +21, Knowledge (local) +10, Knowledge (nature) +10, Knowledge (nobility and royalty) +10, Knowledge (religion) +24, Knowledge (the planes) +10.

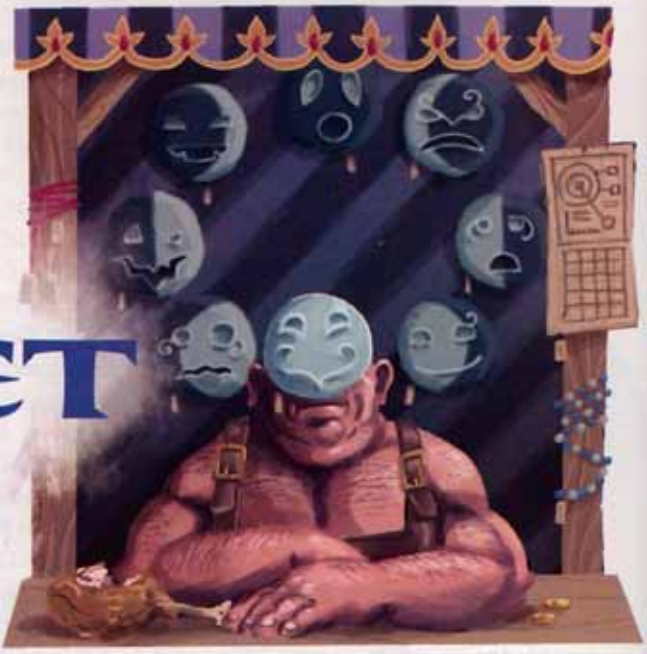
Feats: Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Great Fortitude, Skill Focus (Knowledge [geography]), Skill Focus (Knowledge [religion]).

Languages: Celestial, Common, Draconic, Elven, Sylvan.

Cleric Spells Prepared (caster level 7): 0—*detect magic*, *detect poison*, *mending* (2), *purify food and drink* (2); 1st—*bless*, *comprehend languages*, *endure elements*, *Nystul's magic aura*[D], *sanctuary* (DC 15), *shield of faith*; 2nd—*augury*, *detect thoughts*[D] (DC 16), *gentle repose*, *lesser restoration*, *spiritual weapon*; 3rd—*create food and water*, *dispel magic*[D], *invisibility purge*, *protection from energy*; 4th—*air walk*, *discern lies* (DC 19), *divination*[D].

D: Domain spell. *Domains:* Knowledge (all Knowledge skills are class skills, cast divination spells at +1 caster level), Magic (use spell completion and spell trigger items as 3rd-level wizard).

Possessions: +2 *glamered chain shirt*, +1 *morningstar*, *headband of intellect +4*, *ring of force shield*.



100 MARKET STALLS

BY RICHARD PETT
BY KYLE HUNTER

Not every stall in the market sells swords and 10-foot poles. The bustling trader's wagons carry all kinds of curiosities and unusual trinkets. Whether the PCs are heading to the potion shop or just passing through the market square, here are 100 stalls to add a bit of color to their visit. In most cases, no prices are listed. Assume that everything is sold at about the same price as an equivalent item in the *Player's Handbook*.

d% Vendor

1 Tasty meat pies made in the shape of otters. Delicious!
2 Bows carved with the likenesses of swans. Everyone is buying them!
3 Giant spider silk, the ideal rope. *This is giant spider silk. It comes in a bag, and just sticks to itself, and possibly to whomever pulls it out.*
4 Amuse all with my glove-puppet otyughs!
5 Painted shields of all sizes: you name it, we paint it.
6 Statues of griffons with moving heads.
7 Luxury leather carriage seats: keep your seat sweet.
8 Colored rope, handy for all occasions.
9 Four-pint pewter mugs carved like dragons, for people with a dragon-like thirst!
10 Huge candles designed to burn for weeks, very useful.
11 Spades, shovels, and picks! *A proud spade seller who takes insults to his goods personally.*
12 Who dares buy my purple worm whistle?
13 Outrageously colored velvet robes, the latest rage at court!
14 Wear a wig and look quite big. *Wigs, from functional to the vast and ridiculous.*
15 Scabbards with silver filigree depicting beasts. Every hero needs one!
16 Foldable large weapon stands: be the envy of your friends.
17 Stuffed stirges to hurl at your enemies.
18 Breastplates with gargoyle faces carved on them, all sizes available!
19 Mulled cider and wine to warm your bones.
20 Castle cakes. *Cakes that look like castles but taste like honey.*
21 The very latest in belts, gray leather.
22 Owlbear pelt scarves; you'll be cold without one!
23 Be the envy of your friends with a dire rat trap!
24 Lost? Then why not buy a homing badger! Guaranteed to find their way home. *They do, an hour after purchase.*
25 Who'll buy my lovely sweet-meats?
26 A home isn't a home without a hippogriff weathervane.

27 Cabbages, specially imported. *But not really.*
28 Rusty sword? Use my miracle cloth to keep it clean. *An oily rag scented with perfume.*
29 Keep beholders from your door with this special repellent!
30 Guaranteed dragon bones.
31 Scented oil lamps, let your parlor be fragrant.
32 Herbs and spices, everything in one place!
33 Light the way with my candle helm. *Watch out for burning eyebrows.*
34 Lost your voice, can't be heard? Buy one of my megaphones!
35 Dire ferret skins! Who'll buy my dire ferret skins?
36 Certified musical sheep! *Pan pipes shaped like sheep.*
37 Toffee apples; who wants my toffee apples?
38 Sledges for sale, going fast!
39 Battling medusas? You can't go wrong with a mirror helm! *Yes you can, because they don't work.*
40 Toby jugs, shaped like your favorite woodland creatures: badgers, stoats, and rabbits!
41 Buy a folding seat and relax where others can't. *Unless they have a rock or the ground to sit on.*
42 Hammocks for sale, all colors, all sizes.
43 Who'll buy their child a pet newt? Latest craze at court!
44 Be a star with your own miniature theater! Comes complete with stick puppets, a puppet horse and miniature theater.
45 Homely, repulsive, scarred? Try my guaranteed dryad powder and get ready to fight them off! *Alas, but no.*
46 Scare off swarms of all description with my magical incense. *Which is just normal incense in a fancy box.*
47 Don't lose your quart, buy a manacle tankard!
48 Fancy pavilions and tents of all sizes and colors.
49 Fur-lined helms for the warrior who wants to battle in comfort.
50 Wooden swords for sale, all types, practice in safety!
51 Hand bells for sale.
52 Get noticed! Get a Cloyd's ruff!
53 Get noticed in battle, buy a person flag! *A flag that sticks out of a backpack and tends to fall out frequently.*
54 Go unseen at night with Golid's darkmagic body paint. *Powdered coal in a bag.*
55 Muffins! Fresh muffins! Cinnamon and clove!
56 Spicy ale for sale.
57 Arrows; nice and pointy! *The owner is unaware that a portion of his arrows are masterwork.*
58 Carts and wagons, brightly painted, guaranteed sound. *Nope.*
59 Bric a brac. *There is a 10% chance that any* Player's Handbook *item worth up to 20 gp can be found here for one-third price.*
60 Owlbear beaks, guaranteed protection against scurvy! *Well, no protection against anything, really.*
61 Powdered carrion crawler, cures warts instantly! *Not carrion crawler, not curative, smell like nettles, act like nettles, are nettles.*
62 Buy your love a rose that never dies! *That's because it's a picture of a rose.*
63 Fancy lantern silhouettes, casts the shapes of bears, wolves, and hydras.
64 Be mighty with a fear helm. *Helms with silly angry faces painted on them.*
65 Wings that work! Instructions: go to a high place (say, a mountain) jump, and stretch those wings. Soon you'll be flying like an eagle. *And plummeting like a fool with fake wings.*
66 Get tired easily? Then buy Donkin's Easy Bucket, with the "hole that makes it lighter."
67 Know which bolts and arrows hit with my color-coded feathers.
68 Big appetite? Buy a hefty plate, a tin plate for the adventurer with a big hunger.
69 Dried flowers for sale, all sorts, last forever.
70 Wheelbarrows for sale, very handy.
71 Magic mirrors, look in them and look better! *A gnome mirror salesman who can't stop admiring himself.*
72 Cowbells! Clear-sounding cowbells!
73 Kittens for sale. Buy one for the kiddies today!
74 Foul facial diseases be-gone with Ramsey's Belker Mist. Simply rub the mist upon the face and watch those unsightly boils vanish. *Empty jar, empty promise.*
75 Have a clever-tattoo! *Clever-tattoos are painless and visible only to clever people.*
76 Sexis Elixirs, cures for all. *Sometimes an actual potion or two turns up in this stall for a very low price.*
77 Maps! Maps of the world! *Maps made up in an inn.*
78 Armor oil, keep it shining bright!
79 Pasties, meat pasties, nice and spicy!
80 Cockatrice eggs! *Well, goose eggs painted red.*
81 Cheap armor, highest quality! *Stolen armor.*
82 Nettle ale by the barrel!
83 Poles for all occasions. *A 10-foot pole salesman offers cunning variations, such as 11-foot and 9-foot poles.*
84 Fiendish frogspawn, adults can be trained! *Not when they're not real, they can't.*
85 Cartwheels, spare cartwheels!
86 Pig trotters, fresh cooked today!
87 String, string, string!
88 Chalk: highest quality, imported.
89 Cure smelly feet with minty-rub! *Mint, in fact.*
90 Hear everything with an ear trumpet.
91 Trunks for sale, all sizes, wooden and iron.
92 Sandals, all sizes, a free wooden spoon with every pair!
93 Roper extract, see those muscles grow. *Dried biscuit that looks, tastes, and acts like dried biscuit.*
94 Make everyone happy with your own smiling moon face! *Masks of all descriptions.*
95 Runged rope, the latest craze! *Depending on quality, this rope could give a +1 circumstance bonus on Climb checks or impose a –5 penalty when the metal rungs fall out as they are stepped on.*
96 Walk like a cat with tigerboots. *Boots with soft soles that fall apart within a week.*
97 Oranges and lemons, fresh in today!
98 Make a noise, buy a drum. Drums of all shapes and sizes.
99 Genuine blessed items. *Fake bones and objects from saints of all faiths.*
100 Cure all wounds with cloaker-cure, the magic oil made from cloaker fat. *Oil. It's just oil.*

TREASURE TRAILS

BY HAL MACLEAN,
BY KYLE HUNTER,

In a world of magic, treasure maps come in all shapes and sizes.

Items with their own intrinsic worth can also point the way to even greater riches, making them doubly valuable. Each of the items detailed below may appear in a treasure hoard as a valuable object in its own right. However, each one also serves as a guide to even more fabulous loot, although this may not be obvious at first glance.

TALAXA, THE GUIDING BLADE:

This finely balanced +1 *longsword* bears its name in Elven runes snaking across the upper portion of the blade. Three thumbnail-sized chunks of irregularly shaped crystal adorn its copper hilt. Sometime in the distant past the sword was enchanted with six permanent *magic mouth* spells. The first activates whenever anyone holds the sword and speaks its name aloud. Speaking in Elven, the magic sword offers a cryptic riddle that (if deciphered) leads to landmark such as a waterfall or a mountainous ravine. At this landmark the second *magic mouth* activates, offering up a clue to yet another location. The sixth and final clue, found only after deciphering all the other *magic mouth* spells and locating the landmarks they point to, leads to a carefully hidden dungeon filled with the treasure of an ancient elven king.

Faint illusion; CL 10th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor; Price 6,300; Weight 4 lb.

SCARAB OF ORIENTEERING

This tiny, exquisitely fashioned obsidian statue of a beetle animates whenever it is placed upon a map or any other two-dimensional representation of an area. After crawling over every inch of the map's surface (covering about one square foot each minute), it immediately settles upon the spot that exactly corresponds with the tomb of a long-dead theocrat. If the map does not include this spot the scarab crawls off it and, following the scale of the map precisely, makes its way to where the tomb would be if the map were large enough. The scarab moves in a perfectly straight line, ignoring water, fire, and similar hazards. It may even burrow through solid objects at the rate of 6 inches per round. Once it reaches this spot, or if picked up before it completes its task, the scarab becomes inert until once again placed upon a map.

Faint divination; CL 3rd; Craft Wondrous Item, *locate object*; Price 10,800 gp; Weight 1 lb.

JOTUR THE IMPRINT MAKER

This +1 *war hammer* was fashioned as a crude depiction of a dragon's head and made from jagged granite fixed to a stout wooden shaft tightly wrapped in leather cords. When the hammer scores a critical hit, it inflicts a very unusual wound. In addition to the damage caused by the impact of the hammer, the dragon's head briefly animates, leaving a strange bite mark on its victim as it shouts out its name in an archaic dialect of Giant. While not doing any additional damage, this wound, which covers exactly one square inch, displays a single square from a larger map. By carefully cutting these squares from the flesh of his enemies the wielder of *Jotur the Imprint Maker* may piece together a treasure map leading to the burial chamber of what the map calls "the grandfather of earthshakers." When fully assembled the map is a perfect square. Depending upon the amount of time you want it to take to assemble the map, it could range from a 4x4-inch square (requiring 16 successful critical hits) to an 8x8-inch square (requiring 64 successful critical hits) or even larger. Each time the hammer passes to a new owner it starts over with the first square in the map.

Faint illusion; CL 3rd; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *minor image*; Price 5,900; Weight 4 lb.

HORN OF FOOTSTEPS

This beautiful horn has been carved from the gleaming ivory tusk of some great beast. Sounding this brass-bound war horn emits a mournful howl that echoes across the landscape. Audible for miles, and possibly attracting the curious or perhaps simply the hungry, the horn also creates the outline of strange green glowing footprints with each note. Clearly visible to anyone nearby, these footprints stretch off into the distance at about the pace of a running man, winding their way around natural obstacles, skipping across river stones, always providing the most direct overland route to their destination. Since they fade away after about a quarter of an hour the owner of the horn must use it regularly in order to continue to follow the footprints. The footprints set a rugged pace, demanding hardiness and vigor from those following them, and they seem to resent guiding those unable to keep up under their own power. If the owner of the horn attempts to take any sort of "shortcut," whether riding a horse, casting a *fly* spell or something similar, they fade more and more rapidly. An owner who does not repent and return to following the trail on foot eventually must blow the horn each round to summon the footprints. This exertion puts the owner at risk of becoming exhausted, requiring a DC 15 Fortitude save each round in order to continue. If followed, these footsteps eventually lead to the entrance of a hidden dungeon created by a wizard/ranger who despaired of finding a worthy heir in his own lifetime.

Faint divination; CL 3rd; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *silent image, locate object*; Price 7,600 gp; Weight 5 lb.

DECK OF PORTALS

Feared by many as the dreaded *deck of many things*, these cards posses a different, yet still formidable magical ability. Slightly chill to the touch, they make audible crystalline clicks when shuffled together, while their faces bear all the traditional images of the *deck of many things*. However, anyone using these cards to read the future discovers that the cards have the ability to alter their appearance when dealt. The first three cards laid face up before the dealer offer three different visual clues. Each of these clues depicts a prominent nearby landmark such as a mountain, island, or castle. Should the person who dealt these cards burn or otherwise destroy the appropriate card at each landmark, an extra-dimensional gate opens at the exact center point between the three. This gate remains open for 24 hours once it appears, gradually fading away in the last hour (at which point the three destroyed cards reappear in the deck). The gate leads to the long forgotten meeting hall of a powerful league of arcane spellcasters. All other methods of entry have been lost through the ages. Once the three landmarks have been set they always appear in the same order to the dealer. Only the successful opening, and subsequent closing, of the gate allows the entrance to shift to a new location.

Strong conjuration; CL 13th; Craft Wondrous Item, *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion*; Price 183,000 gp; Weight 1 lb.

LAW OF THE LAND

BY RUSSELL BROWN,
BY KYLE HUNTER,

In true wilderness, there is no law except kill or be killed. On the fringe of the wild, however, the laws of civilization can be found in the men who travel there to hunt or gather. Order in the borderlands is upheld by the loners, conscripts, and adventurers that are attracted to the natural world. There are never enough of these lawmen, so they carry out their duty with single-mindedness, often ignoring crime outside their jurisdiction or not their concern. This article presents a handful of frontier enforcers, ready to jump to your PCs' defense if they're attacked by brigands or to confront them if they break the law of the land.

FOREST WARDEN

Warden **Jeris Therpol** (LN male half-elf ranger 8) is a loyal subject of the local ruler. He protects a broad forest, far from the nearest city but a valuable source of rare resources and a popular recreation spot for wealthy nobles. Warden Therpol is very thin and covered in light, layered clothing of natural colors. He avoids contact and conversation with strangers unless such is required to carry out his duty.

The warden patrols his forest, tracking down poachers with his animal companion—a dire weasel named Ventch (see *Monster Manual* 65). He is mainly concerned with poachers hunting for profit and probably ignores the foraging of a small, traveling band of PCs. He is also on the watch for illegal settlements on his lands, discouraging anyone not granted an official charter by his lord from setting down permanent roots. Common crimes against travelers that do not threaten his forest are not his concern.

Every five days, Warden Therpol returns to a large walnut tree near the edge of his range. There his lord's men can find him to deliver messages or take custody of prisoners. Local citizens also come to the tree to lodge complaints.

Though he represents the law of civilization, Warden Therpol operates on its fringe. When challenged, he fights to kill. He is sometimes reluctant to trust his captives to prosecution in the towns, so his justice can come swiftly, without process. He is fond of tying captives to ant-infested trees until they become docile.

HUNTSMAN

If wealthy nobles and merchants want to bring home respectable trophies from their hunts in the open hills and forests, they hire **Black Lorust** (CN male human expert 6, Track [Survival +12]) to lead them. He knows every animal run and refuge and owns the best-trained hounds in the region.

When a fugitive from a town or city escapes to the wilderness, the job of tracking him down also falls to Lorust. His knowledge of the surrounding lands and his hounds give him an advantage over most criminals (up to two dogs can make aid another tracking rolls to help Lorust, see the *Player's Handbook* 65).

Lorust is a short, unkempt, stocky man, sometimes mistaken for a dwarf. His few friends like to say that he relates better to dogs because they're closer in height and have similar grooming habits.

WILDERNESS ROAD TOLLMEN

Awnys Halftooth (LN male human fighter 4) is a tollman that works for the Eastern Banshee trading company. He, his deputy **Renn** (LG male human warrior 2), and a priest of Fharlanghn named **Serratt** (LN female dwarf cleric 4) collect tolls at a checkpoint along a wilderness road between a small trading town and the nearest city.

Awnys is a muscular man with curly black hair who would be quite handsome if he wasn't missing half his teeth. He does his best to present a tough image, but if he gets excited he whistles when he talks.

The toll at the station is 5 cp per traveler, horse, or cart. About half of this money goes back to the local ruler to help maintain and protect the roads. A third goes to the temple of Fharlanghn in the city. The Eastern Banshee trading company keeps whatever is left.

If a well-armed party refuses to pay the toll, Awnys allows them to pass, but makes sure Renn gets a good look at them. Renn keeps a light warhorse in a small stable just off the road, and he uses it to ride ahead of the toll violators to report them to the watchmen at their destination.

BORDER GUARDS

Peale Solago (LG male human aristocrat 6) commands a small border fort on the road between two nations. He is the son of a noblewoman who has been accused of withholding taxes from her lord. Peale volunteered for the border post to separate himself from his mother's troubles and to begin rebuilding his own reputation. He has been at his post only two months, and his men (five human warrior 1) already despise him for his soft upbringing.

Peale and his men are charged with inspecting travelers and cargo passing along the road. Peale makes sure no one enters with diseased animals or any kind of illegal substance. He also checks the left forearm of any suspicious travelers entering or leaving the country for a special tattoo used to mark convicted criminals.

If the garrison is attacked, the border guards send a warning to the rest of the army. Peale uses homing pigeons, a couple of fast horses, and a signal fire atop the small keep to spread the news.

WATER BAILIFF

Captain Laren Leewader (LG human ranger 6, Profession [sailor] +10) is the water bailiff for the rivers and canals passing through a dangerous wilderness area. His job is to insure the safety of the boats and barges passing through. He is captain of the *Sylph*, a two-masted ship with four crewmen (human commoner 2) and two soldiers (human warrior 3). The ship is equipped with a ballista (*Dungeon Master's Guide* 100) mounted in the bow, and another in the stern. The ship is also equipped with four oars used in unfavorable winds.

Only Captain Leewader's dark eyes, crooked nose and thin, sun-chapped lips show through his bushy hair and beard.

When he's on deck, his keen eyes watch the banks and the river ahead for trouble, and he has little tolerance for idle chatter. His animal companion, a crocodile (*Monster Manual* 271) named **Jealousy**, is never far from the ship.

Captain Leewader's main concern is keeping the waterways open, but he is willing to put his ship and his men at the disposal of the local sheriff and wardens to fight land-based lawbreakers. His men respect him and trust his leadership.

REMOTE KEEP GARRISON

Marshall Gharen (NG half-orc fighter 6) is the commander of the token garrison of troops (eight human warrior 2) at Sable Keep, a small stone fortress overlooking a pass far up in the hills. He and his soldiers keep the pass clear of bandits. The garrison also provides some protection to the villages on either side of the pass, and the grateful villagers return the favor by supplementing the keep's meager food supply.

Gharen makes the rules in the pass, and he is fond of letting his men and any travelers know it. He spends his days wandering the roof of the keep, watching the pass below. Two of his men, **Reiland** and **Steelpot**, are stationed in the pass, and are ready to stop travelers at Gharen's shouted command. Gharen seems to choose travelers at random for inspection and questioning. If he doesn't like their answers or attitude, he sends them back the way they came.

NIGHT WATCHMAN

In a small frontier village that gets little attention from the local solders, has no fort or castle, and cannot afford to pay a permanent militia, volunteers like **Slate Bluehone** (LN dwarf expert 4) take turns standing watch at night. He climbs the crude wooden stockade wall to stand on a thin parapet and scan the dark fields for trouble. When friendly visitors approach, he has to climb back down to act as a gatekeeper. Slate has little combat experience, so his only recourse when trouble threatens is to raise the "hue and cry," waking all of the townspeople for a show of force in numbers. During extended periods of trouble, the village leaders impose a curfew shortly after dark to make the night watchman's job easier.

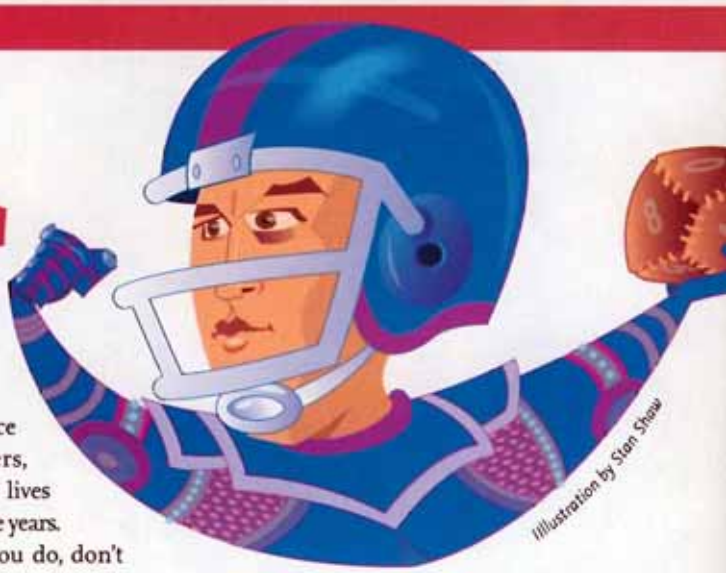
Slate is an amiable, talkative dwarf when working at his forge by day. On the nights he draws watch duty, he wraps himself in ragged leather armor and furs and is much less friendly. He is not shy about voicing his displeasure with anyone begging entry to the village or wandering its streets past curfew.

I
FOOL'S ERRAND
So we pop out of Astral space in the Soft Sea, a vast mushroom tangle three days from the surface. From there, it's more than a week through Zigzwang to Blister Pass. I have no idea how we'll avoid being murdered by humans. I hope this dragon appreciates us walking his stupid dog."
LOOPS
DOWNER
TAGGIT
THE GITHYANKI
IZANK
DOWNER, THIS SKANK IS A THREAT TO THE WHOLE OPERATION.
WE NEED THE METAL.
'SIDES, SHE ONLY WANTS TO KILL YOU. I THINK IT'S CUTE.
SHUT UP YOU TWO! ZEY VATCH US.
OUCHIE OWOWIE OUCH OW OWIE OUCHIE
RED SCREAMERS. PHAERLOCKS. WRETCHED AMPHIBIANS CONSTANTLY WRACKED WITH TERRIBLE PAIN.
THEY'RE HAPPY TO SHARE IT WITH YOU IF YOU CATCH THEIR EYES. IZANK AND THE BARD SCARPER. WE CAN'T MOVE.
WONDER GHOST FINDS UNLIKELY HELP, JUST LIKE THAT.
THE GOODY-TWO-SHOES SAVES MY LIFE AGAIN. I'M SURE GLAD I KILLED HIM.

Story and art by Kyle Stanley Hunter. Lettering by Sean Glenn. Downer is © 2005 Kyle Stanley Hunter. A Super Unicorn production. www.superunicorn.com

THE SHROOMIES HARVEST THEIR FOOD OFF THE ROTTING FLESH OF FREE-RANGE ZOMBIES.
THEY'RE BUSY LITTLE GOURMANDS. THERE'S ALWAYS PLENTY OF DEAD STUFF LYING AROUND. FOLKS TRADE PLATINUM FOR THEIR TRUFFLES.
THANKS. WE WERE STARVING. I THOUGHT STONEBONES TURNED ALL THE ZOMBIES INTO CORPSE GOLEMS FOR THE WAR. AIN'T THAT TOUGH ON BUSINESS?
YES. THEY'RE ALL DRY LIKE DIRT. NO ORGONE ENERGY.
WE FIND, HOWEVER, THE DELICIOUS SLIMES GROW EVEN BETTER ON LIVING SPECIMENS.
WE KEEP THE CHATTEL DOCILE WITH THE SAME PSYCHOTROPIC FUNGI YOU'RE SO RECKLESSLY GORGING ON.
I FAIL MY SAVE. I'M @%!#!!
THE GITHYANKI CHICK HAS WHAT I'D DESCRIBE AS A "BAD TRIP."
LOOPS SETTLES HER DOWN AFTER TWO AND A HALF HOURS.
THE SMALL ONES WERE ESPECIALLY DELICIOUS.
TO BE CONTINUED

THE BACKUP QB



In my first Wil Save column, I wrote about introducing my stepkids to D&D, and how excited I was to share something that I loved with them. Readers have written to ask me how The Big Game turned out. This month, I'll return to the days shortly after I wrote that first column, and give you an update...

February, 2004

Several months ago, I sat in a pub with a good friend of mine who had just found out his wife was pregnant. We hoisted pints of Guinness and ate vinegar-soaked chips covered with salt. Ah, the reckless abandon of celebration.

"I can't believe I'm going to be a father! I'm equal parts terrified and excited." He said. "You've been doing this for a few years, and you seem like a pretty good father—"

"Stepfather," I corrected him.

"Whatever. You're a father-figure."

"I'm more like a backup quarterback who can get pulled from the game at any time, but go ahead."

"If you could only give one bit of advice to me, what would it be? What's the most important thing?"

Now it was my turn to take a long drink. And then another.

"Forty-two," I said, and we both laughed.

"Don't try to be your kid's best friend. It's the single biggest mistake parents make. Love them, play with them, let them know how much they mean to you, but be their parent. They can make friends, but they can't make parents. That's your job."

I took another drink.

"And one night, you're going to put your sweet, loving, adorable child to bed, and when she wakes up..."

"She'll be a teenager." He said gravely.

"Yep. Teenagers are how the gods punish you for having sex."

We giggled, then we laughed, then we sat in silence. I thought about all the things we'd done together since we were teenagers, about the ways our lives had changed over the years.

"And whatever you do, don't let your kid scream in restaurants."

"I'm way ahead of you on that one." He said.

* * *

That scene replayed itself in my mind when my stepson Nolan called me from my wife's cell phone the day I was supposed to take him and his brother into their first dungeon.

Nolan had a lot of homework, and he was worried. "I have a fifty-two word vocabulary test tomorrow, and I have a math challenge," he said. "But I really want to play DUNGEONS & DRAGONS."

"Time to put on the parent hat." I thought.

"Well, Nolan, I really want to play, too. But homework comes first. I don't want you racing through your work to go play with a friend, and I certainly don't want you to race through your homework to play with me."

"But when can we play?" He said. "I'm not with you and mom this weekend."

"We'll play next week," I said. "I'll use the weekend to study the *DM's Guide* even more."

Secretly, I was relieved. Among the three of us, I bet I was the most excited to play, but I didn't feel 100% prepared. I could use a few more hours of study, and a few more simulated battles. I wanted this game to be awesome for them, so they'd want to play again. I was only going to get one chance to make them gamers, and I didn't want to blow it.

"Will you help me study for my test?"

"You bet." I said.

"Okay! Well, I'll see you when we get home. I love you!"

Even though he's twelve, Nolan is quick to tell me he loves me, never shies away from holding my hand when we go places together, and always gives me long, warm hugs goodbye, even when we're at his school.

"I love you too, Nolan." I said. I really, really do.

Moments after I hung of the phone, it rang again.

"Wil? It's Ryan."

"Hey, Ryan. What's up?"

"Are we still playing D&D tonight?"

"Well..."

"Because I have way too much homework."

I told him about Nolan's test, and the ensuing delay of game.

"Oh, that's a relief." He said. "Okay, I have to go. See you in a while."

"Okay. I love you."

"Love you too," he said.

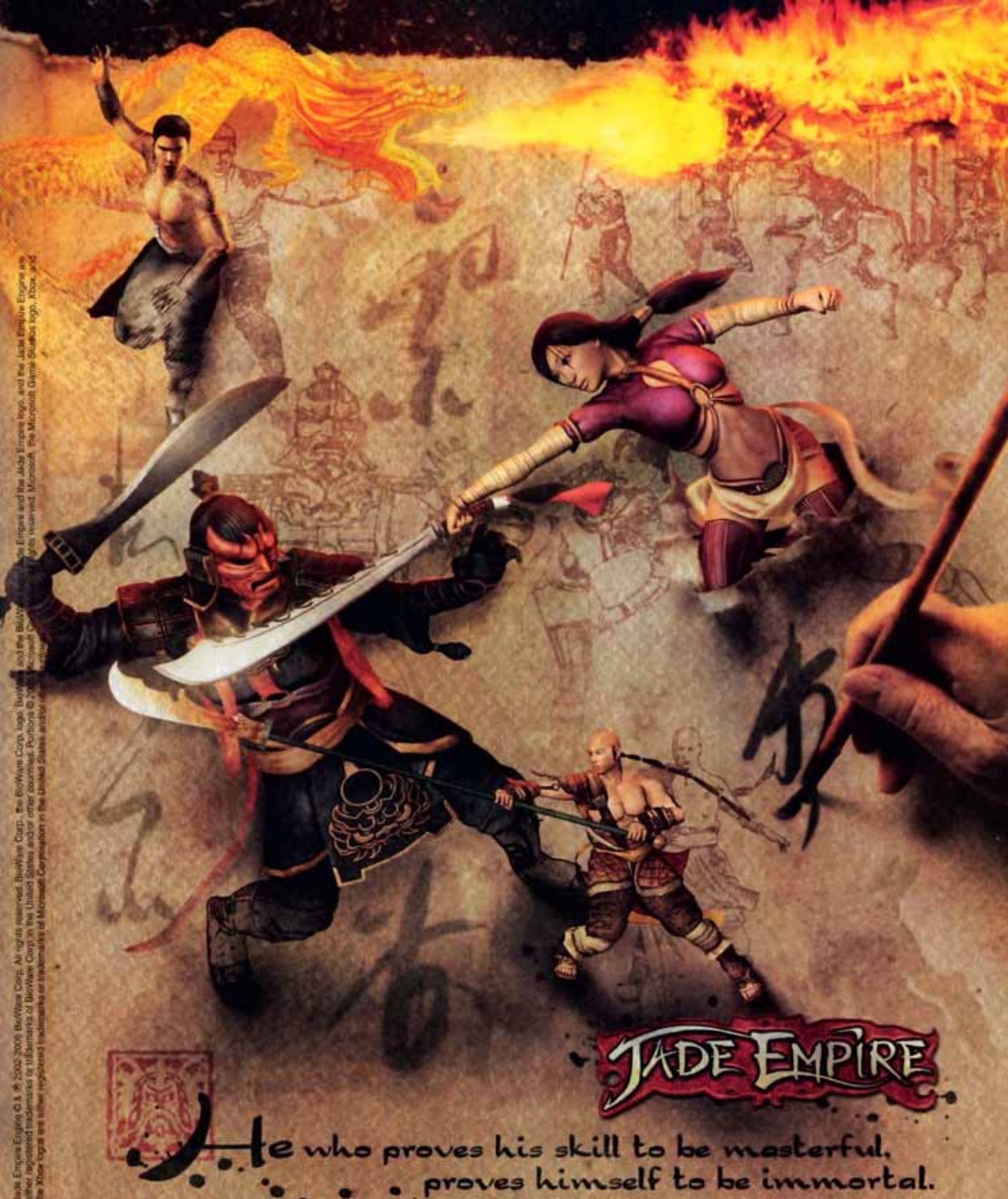
I hung up the phone and sat there, alone at my dining room table. D&D maps and books surrounded me. My dogs Ferris and Riley slept at my feet.

"Not bad for a backup QB," I thought. "I think this kid has some promise."

February, 2005

It's a year later, and though I'm still a backup, I'm enjoying the game. My DUNGEON MASTER'S *Guide* and *Player's Handbook* are on my desk, next to pictures of the boys. My bag of dice sits just put of reach to my left, where two miniatures are locked in mortal combat atop a pile of graph paper. It's Friday, and I hope, for the 52nd week in a row, that this weekend will be the one when we finally get the time to play.

Check out Wil's blog at wilwheaton.net.



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DUNGEON #123

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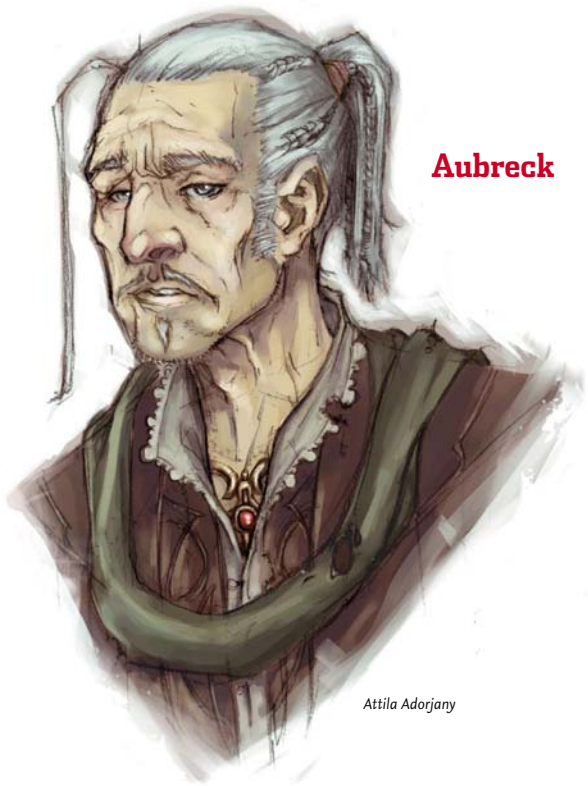
Attila Adorjany

SALVAGE OPERATION

By Mike Mearls

Many moons ago, a powerful merchant's fortunes collapsed as a ship filled with his wares vanished. Four days ago, the missing ship was spotted, listing terribly and adrift at sea. The merchant gathers the last of his resources to mount an expedition to the ship, yet are he and your players prepared for what lurks inside its slowly sinking ruin? A D&D adventure for 2nd-level characters.



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Attila Adorjany

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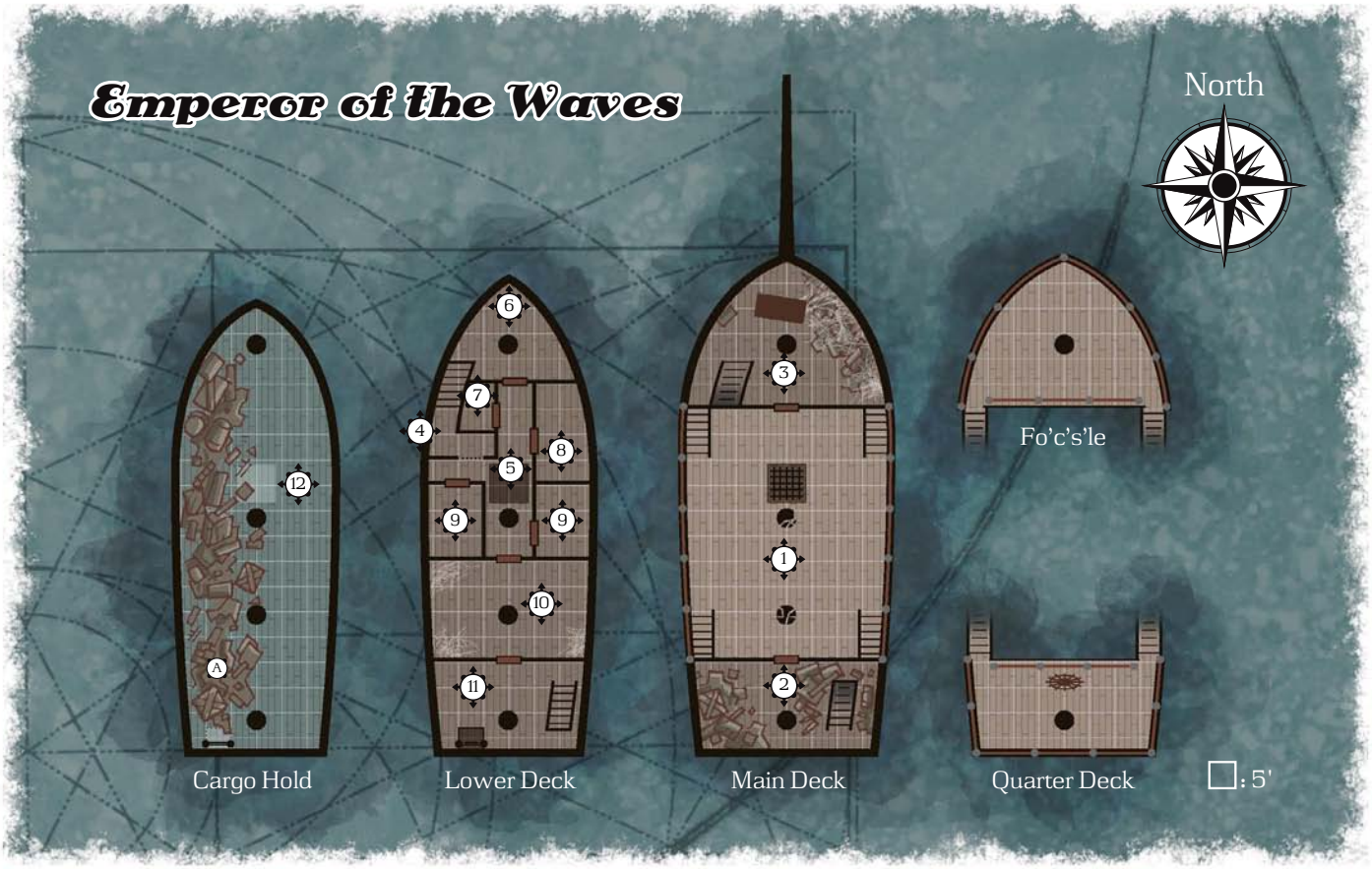

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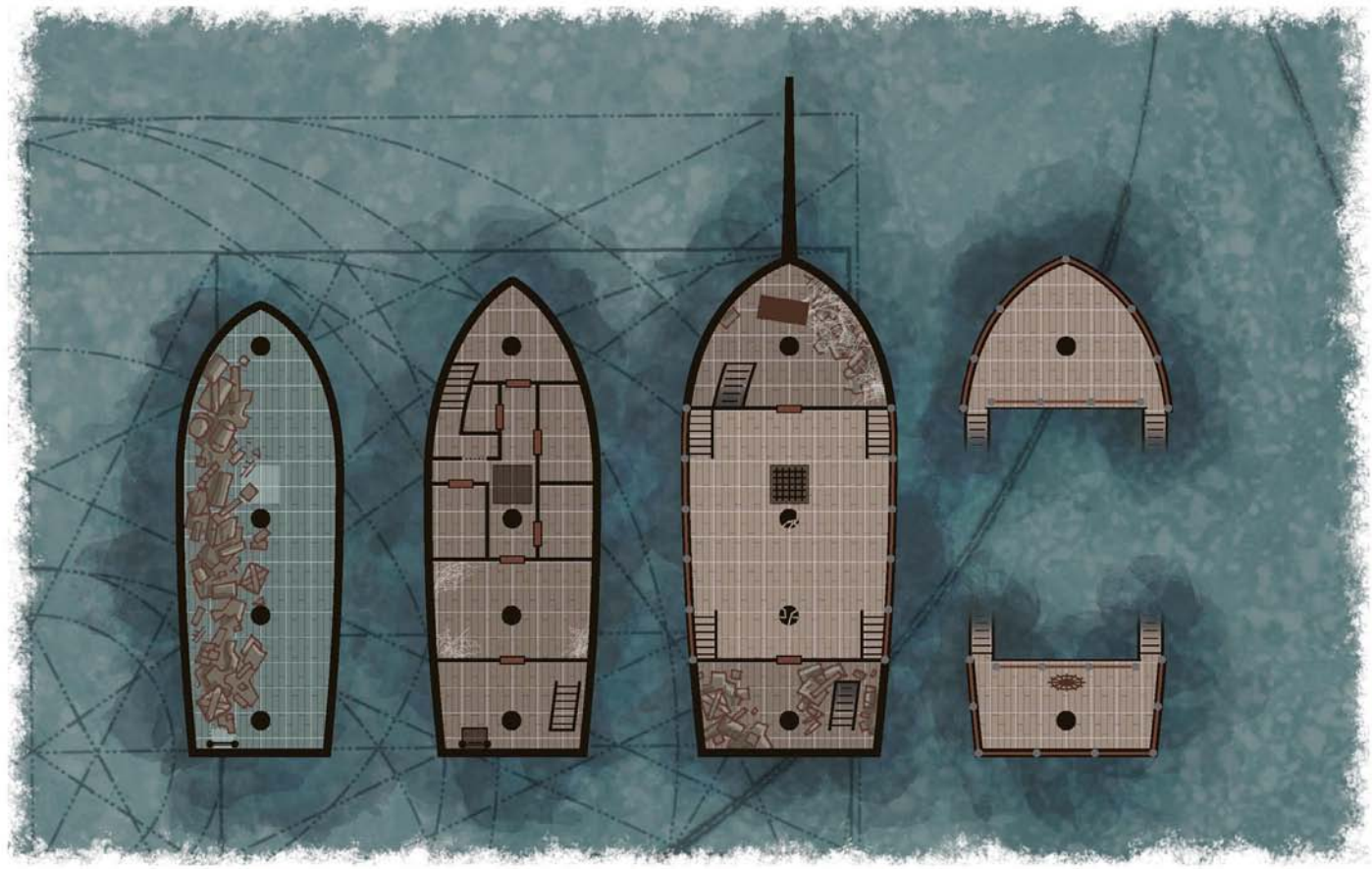

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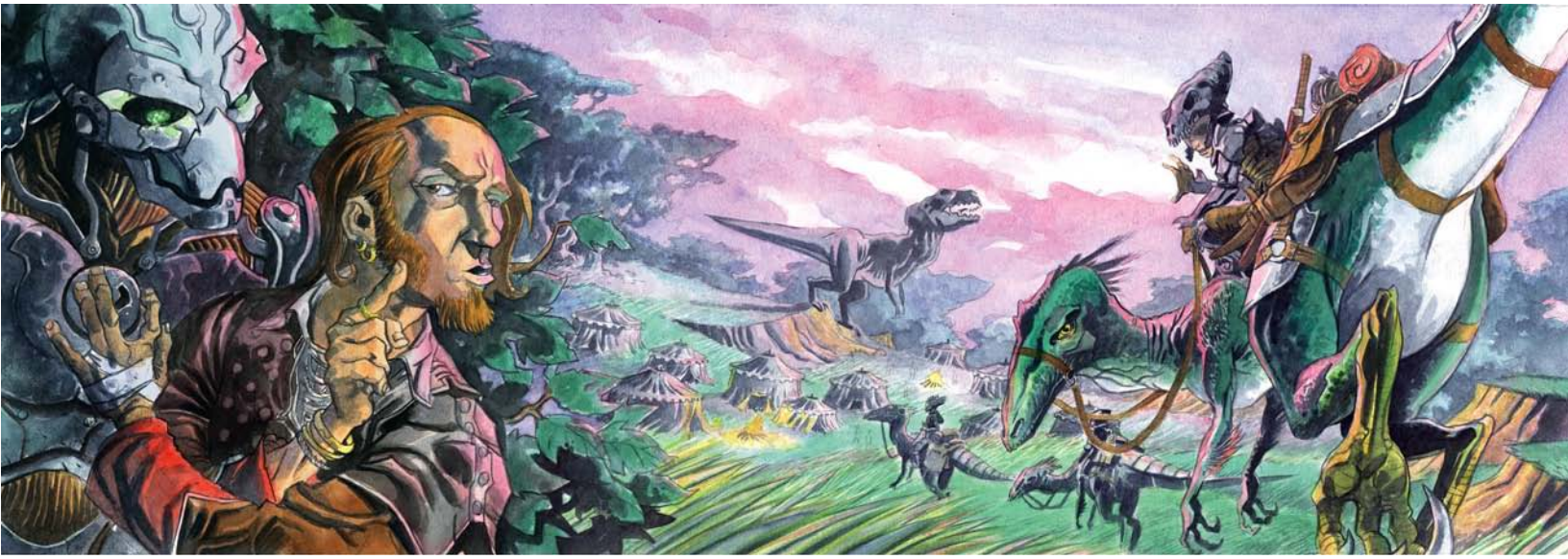

CRYPT OF CRIMSON STARS

By Andy Collins and James Wyatt

Rumors of an Eberron dragonshard of enormous size and power have reached the ears of Tophran Damilek, one of Sharn's wealthiest citizens. Unfortunately, the shard seems to be concealed within a trap-laden temple-tomb, a tomb itself located below a village of cruel halfling nomads and their dinosaur pets. "Crypt of Crimson Stars" is part one of the three-part "Shards of Eberron" campaign arc, which debuted at Gen Con Indy 2004 as the official D&D Open tournament, sponsered by the RPGA. An EBERRON adventure for 6th-level characters.

Ramon Perez

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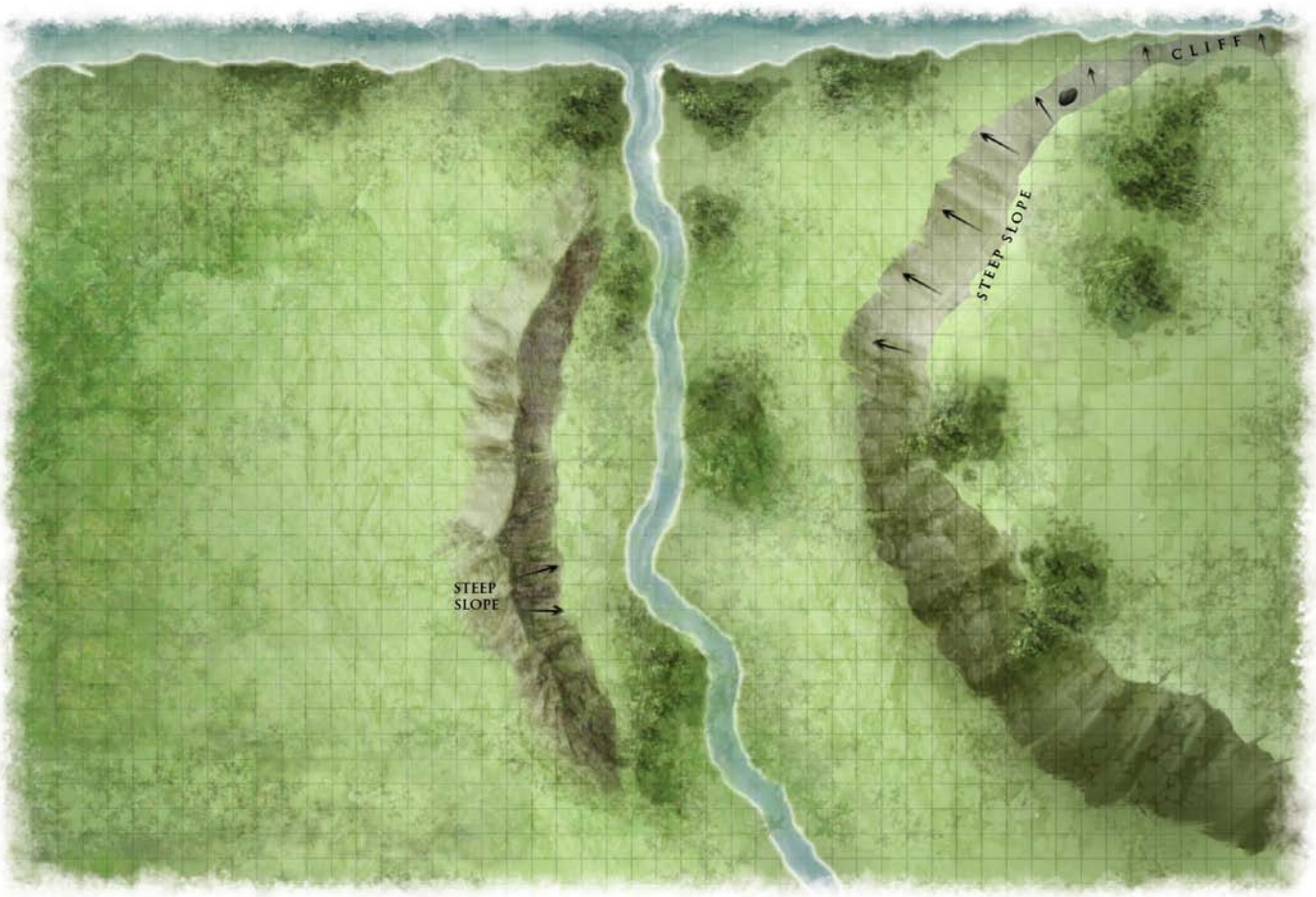

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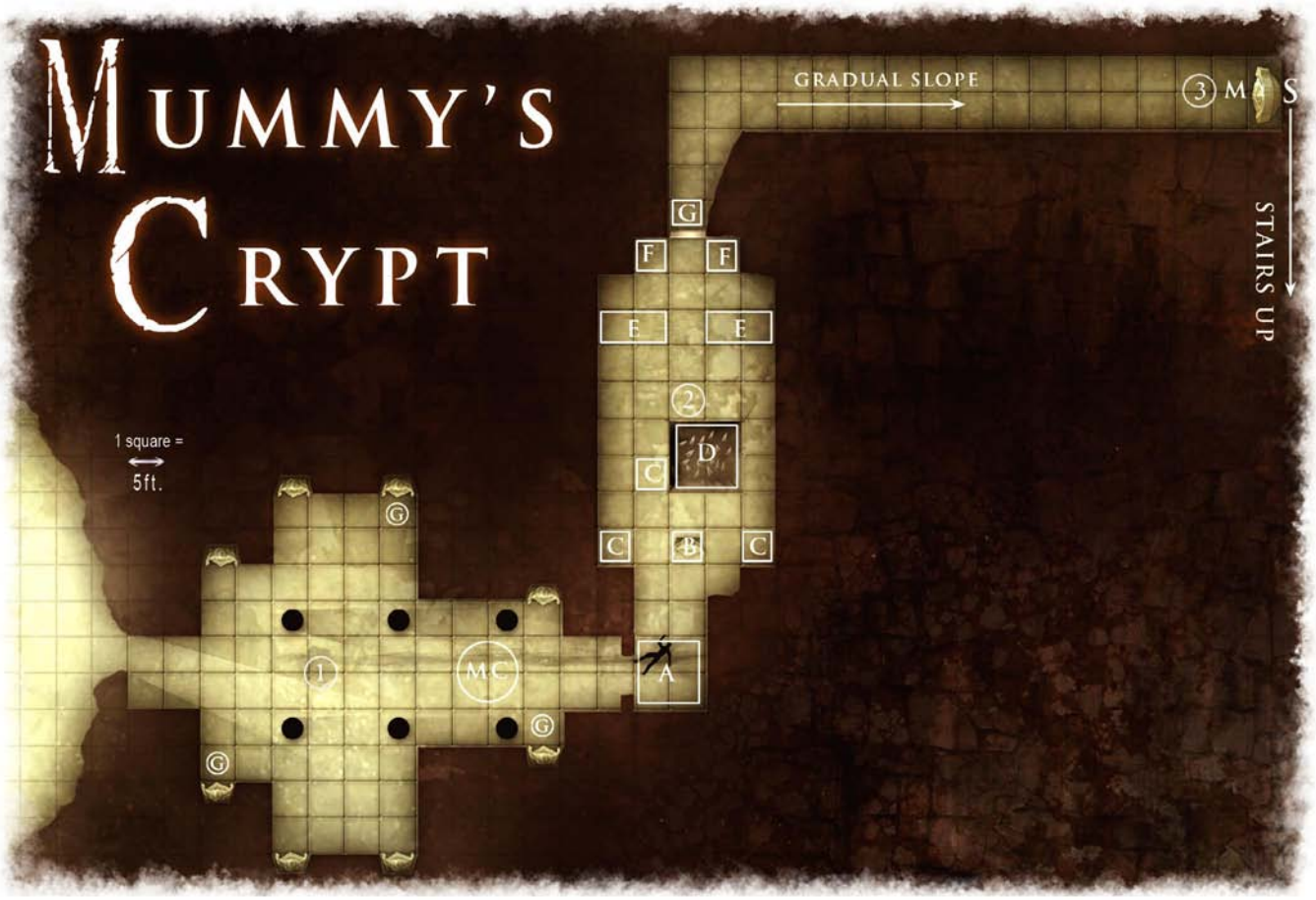

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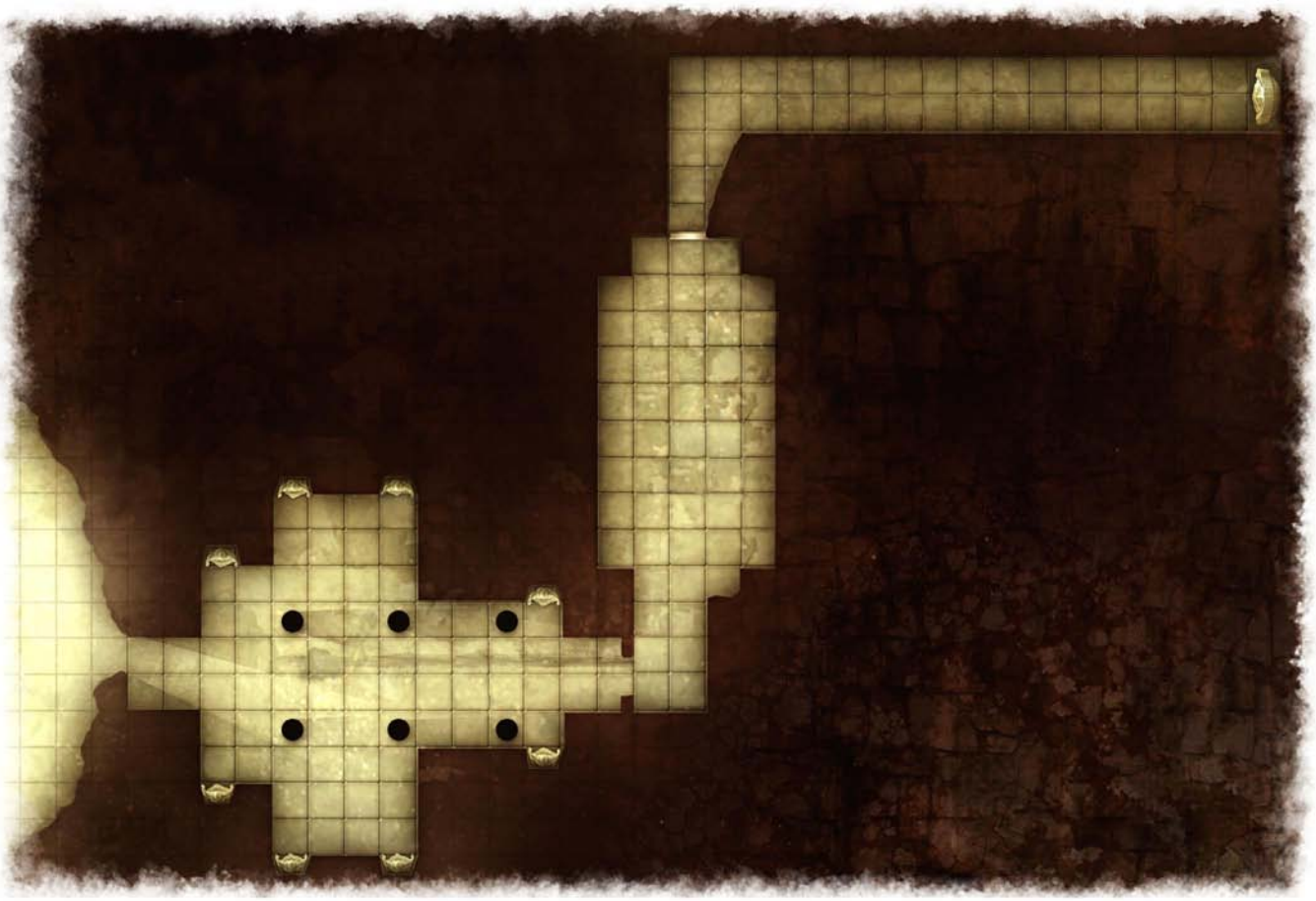

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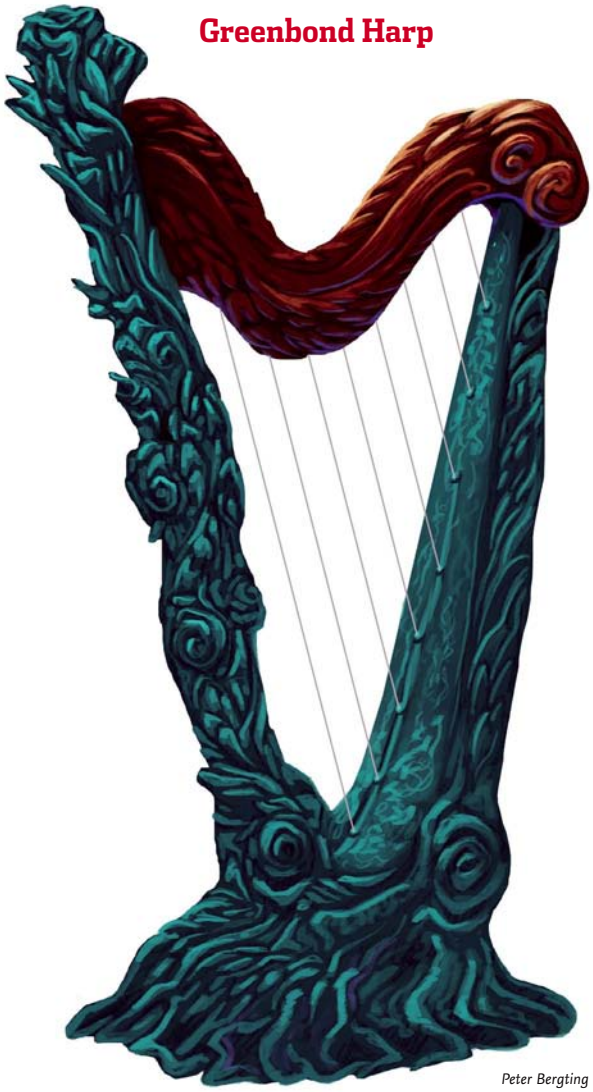
Peter Bergting

THE AMARANTHA AGENDA

by Phillip Larwood

What happens when a sinister conjurer catches a dryad and manages to bind her fey spirit to a carnivorous tree from the Abyss? The caretakers of Heartwood Grove found out the hard way—can the PCs reclaim this sacred elven site from its corrupted mistress before she extends her powers even further? A D&D adventure for four 13th-level characters.

Greenbond Harp



Peter Bergting

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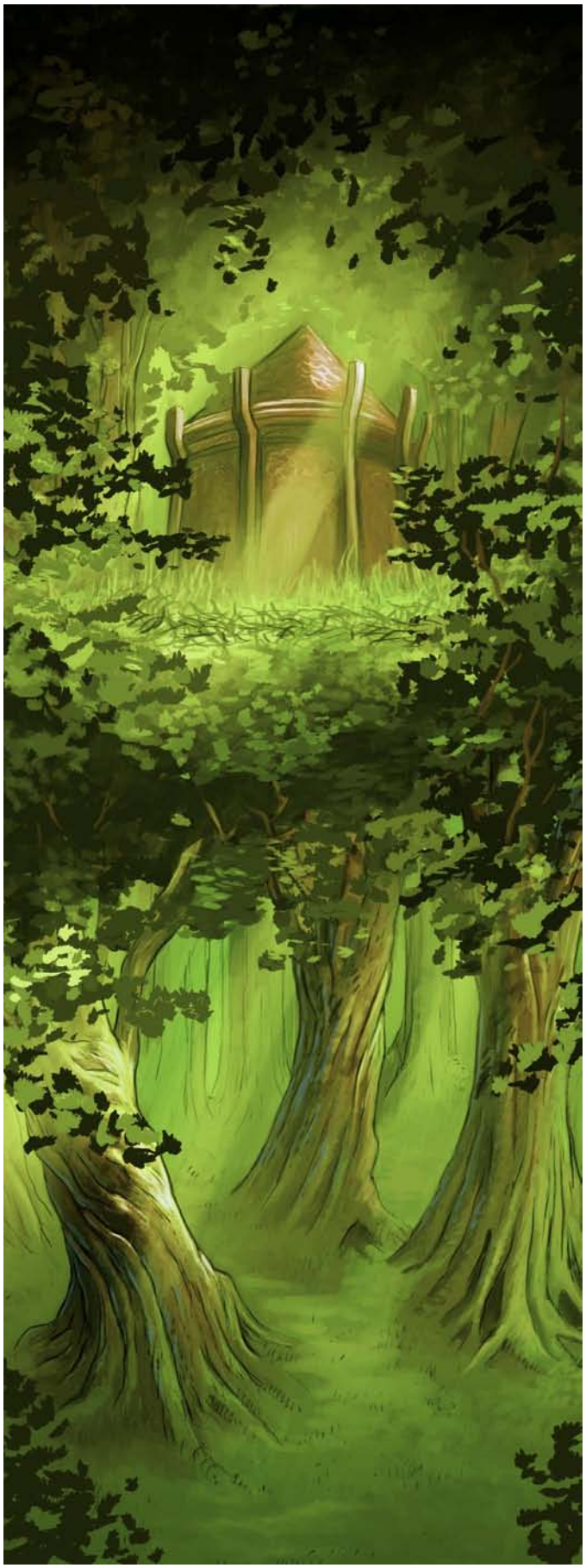

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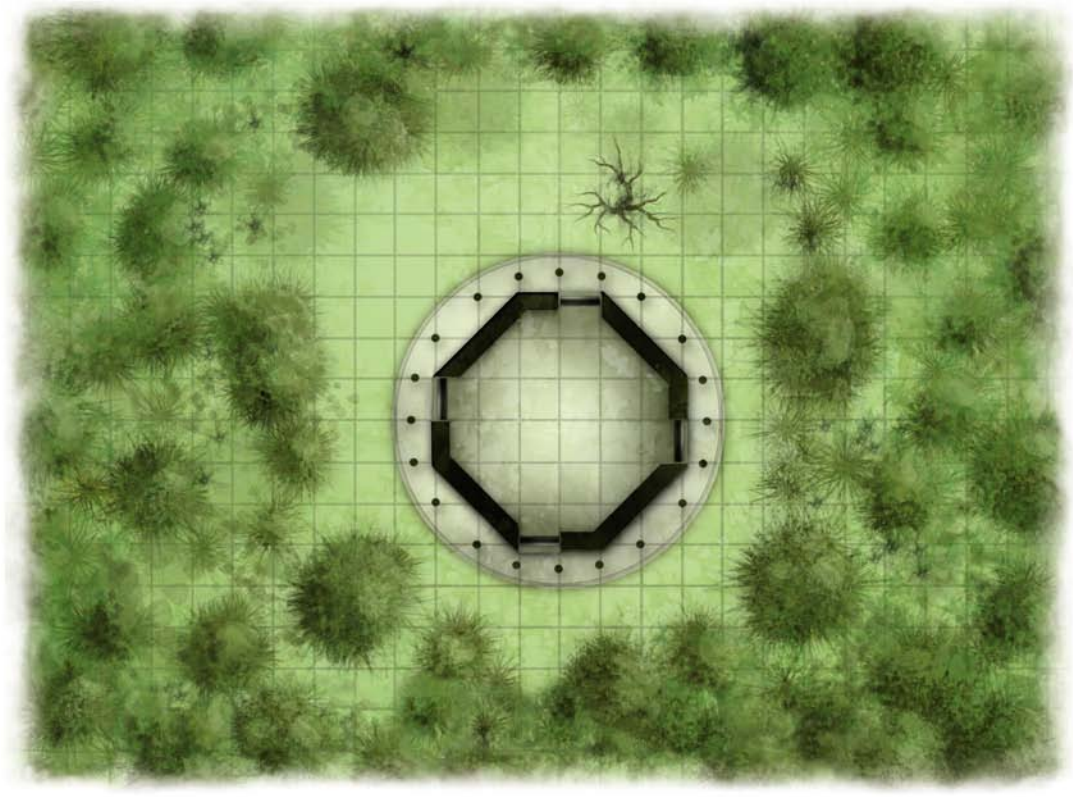

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Joachim Barrum

QUICKSILVER HOURGLASS

By Anson Caralya

Hidden between the planes of existance and behind time itself for countless eons, the Quicksilver Hourglass has kept its terrible prisoner obscured from reality. Yet now, the leader of a transplanar conspiracy of vampiric masterminds has invaded this ancient prison, intent on unleashing a wretched doom upon all that live and breathe. An epic D&D adventure for 30th-level characters.

Ojhalia

Eva Widermann

Huersefful

Eva Widermann

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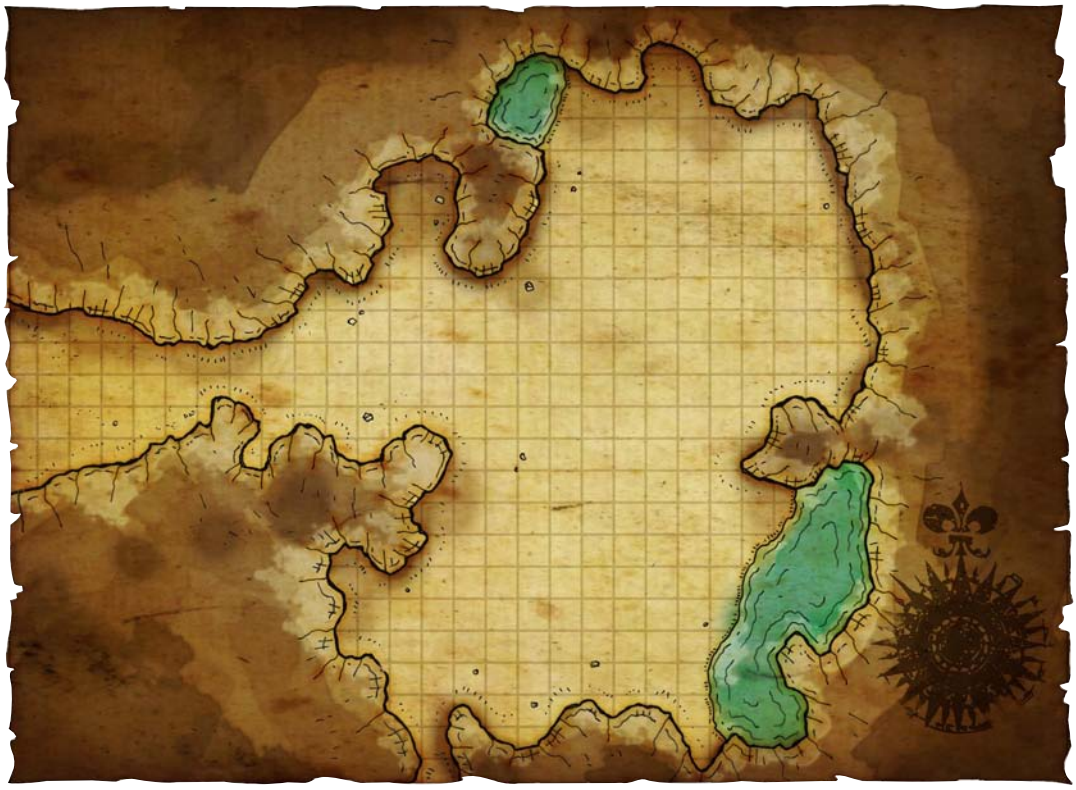

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Joachim Barrum

Joachim Barrum

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Erivatius

Eva Widermann

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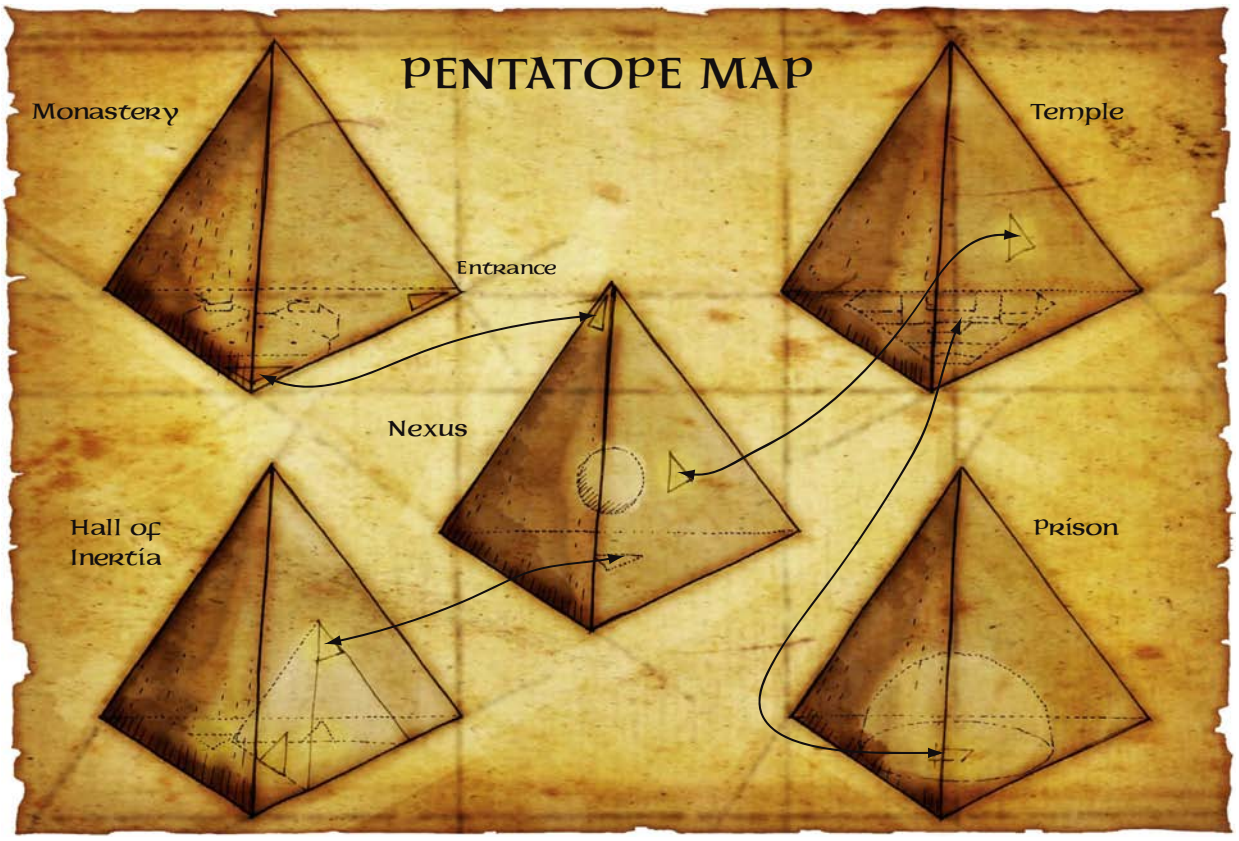
Voursuol

Joachim Barrum



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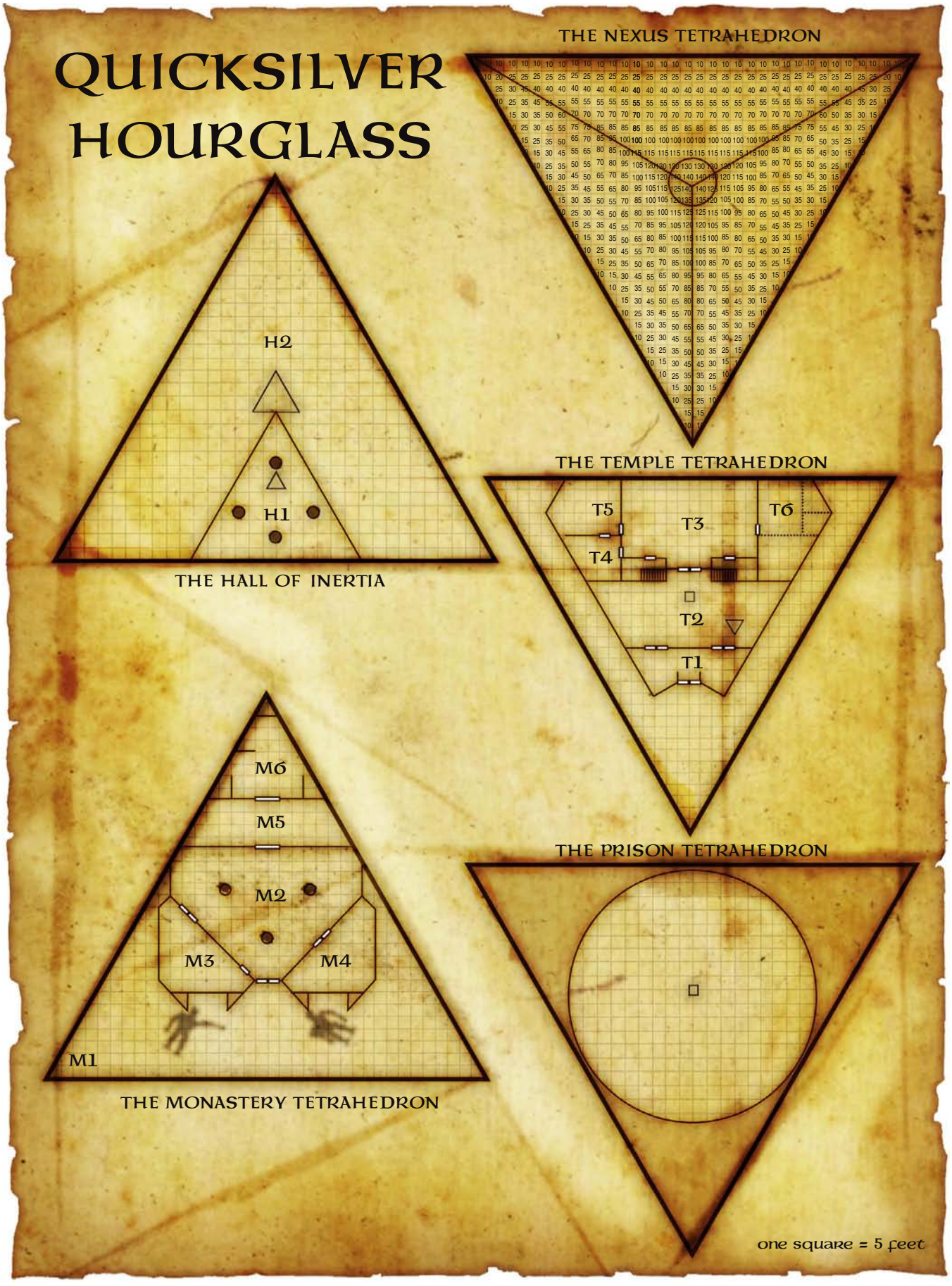
QUICKSILVER HOURGLASS



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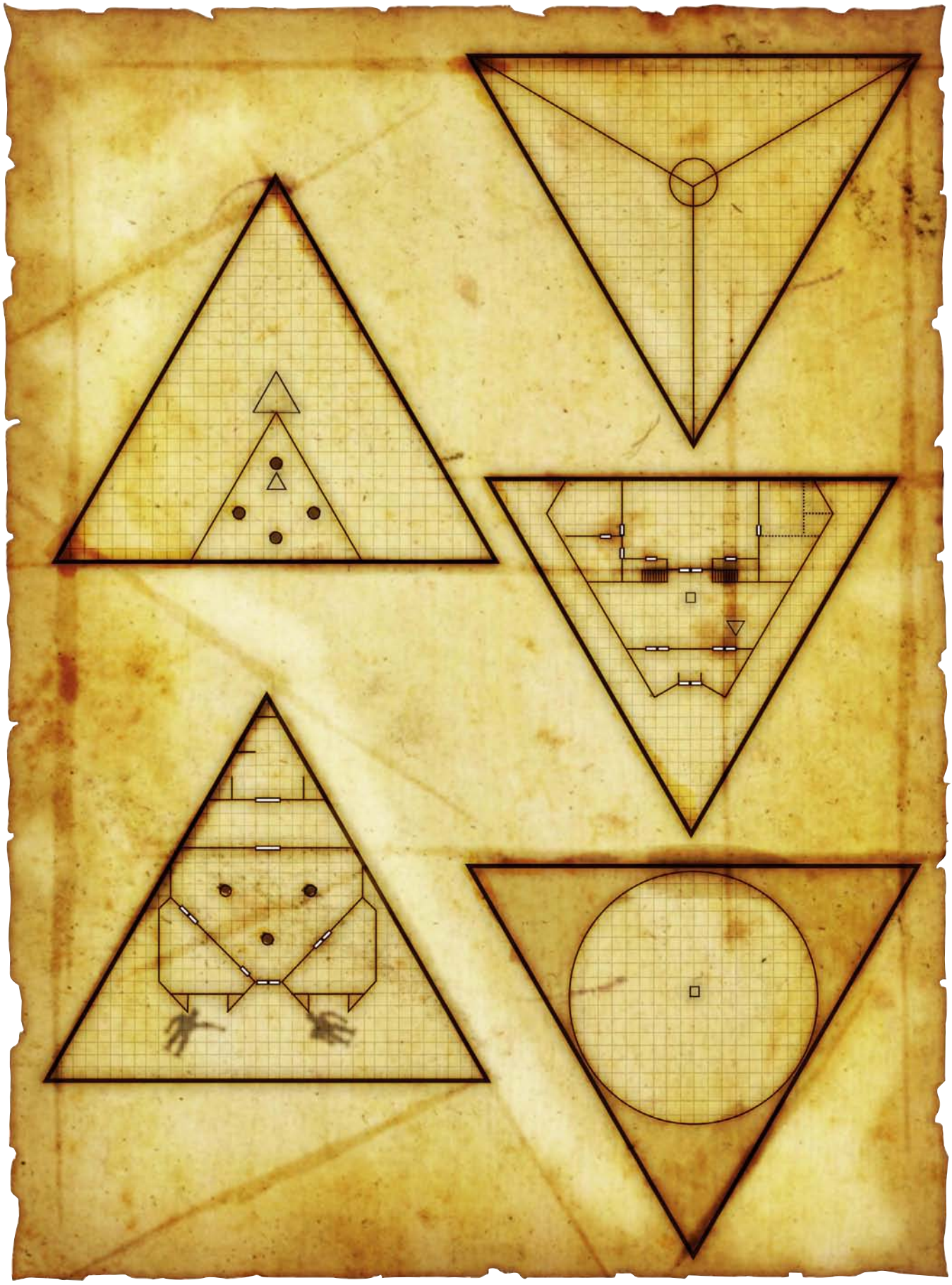

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